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ROBERT NEILL

The Mills of Colne

Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers that begat us.



ARROW BOOKS LTD

178-202 Great Portland Street, London, W.I





HUTCHINSON GROUP

London Melbourne Sydney Auckland Bombay Toronto Johannesburg New York



First published by Hutchinson & Co., (Publishers) Ltd., 1958 as Song of Sunrise

Arrow edition 1961

© Robert Neill 1958

Made and printed in Great Britain by The Anchor Press, Ltd., Tiptree, Essex

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I must acknowledge my debt to Mr. Wilfred Spencer, formerly Librarian of Colne, for his help in the preparation of this book. He shared with me a long search in the Parish Registers. He found for me a multitude of documents—maps, letters, deeds and posters—which brought life and colour to the picture I was forming of a time and people. He contributed many further details from his own knowledge and researches. I am deeply grateful to him.

ROBERT NEILL

THE MILLS OF COLNE

1

THE WHARF AT WANLESS

THE Cornmill in the Greenfield Meadows had stopped. In the hot dry summer the river had fallen low, and there was not enough water to keep the mill wheel turning. It had stopped an hour ago, and the roar and rumble of machinery had given place to stillness, to the ripple of water and the song of birds. The men had been sent home early, and their voices had died away with the clatter of their clogs on the stony track. Two men remained, standing by the pool in the hot afternoon sunshine.

'It's the end for today,' said the elder gloomily. 'We'll have to wait for water, and I haven't seen a cloud for weeks.'

He was John Phillips, the owner of the mill. His companion, a man in his late twenties, taller and more slender than Phillips, was looking thoughtfully at the water and seemed to be estimating levels.

'There'll be enough by morning,' he said, 'to run for an hour, and that's all we need.'

'We're down to that?'

'I did try to tell you.'

'Yes.' Phillips spoke curtly, and then his face eased. 'I'm sorry, Shaw. I ought to have listened to you, but I wanted to see the children swim. What's the trouble?'

'What you might guess. With half the town out of work they aren't buying bread. So the bakers aren't buying flour and the corn doesn't come for grinding.'

'I suppose you're right.'

'You know I am.'

So did everybody else, and in this June of 1837, with trade as bad as men had known, there could be no pretence about it. But Phillips did not seem satisfied. He looked thoughtfully round him, noting the heavy stones of the mill, the squat bulk of the wheelhouse, and the low embankment of the canal that crossed the river here. On the canal a boat was moving, pulled by a patient horse, and for a moment he seemed to watch it. Then he turned again to his companion.

'But grain for an hour?'

'We haven't bookings for any more. They'll come, of course, but they haven't come yet. And what we've had this week won't cover wages.'

The tone was quiet, but it was crisp and uncompromising. Robert Shaw had been clerk to the mill for two years now, and he was not a man to distort facts.

'Thanks for telling me.' Phillips spoke as quietly. 'I suppose I ought to have known it, but I'm afraid I do leave the figures to you.'

His glance had moved away again. In the field beyond the mill two small girls were scampering along the towing path, shouting shrill questions to the moving boat, and Phillips watched them fondly.

'Listen to them', he said. 'In two minutes they'll know all about that boat, where it's come from, where it's going to, what it's taking, and why.'

'But what am I to do about the hands tomorrow?'

'Why tomorrow?'

'Because it will be Saturday.'

'Then I suppose you'll pay them.'

'You haven't work for them all. Are you turning some of them off?'

'Not just yet. Things may improve, and we can hold out for a week or two.'

'Well, I'm glad of that. In these days I shouldn't like to look at a man I was turning off.'

'Nor should I. But isn't that Susan?'

Over a low ridge, a hundred yards up-stream, a woman had come into sight, walking from the comfortable house beyond. She waved back, but she continued across the meadow to the canal bank where the children were. Phillips nodded.

'Let's join them,' he said easily. 'But' I've something to say

He seemed to be in no hurry about it, and they were half-way to the canal before he said more. Then he stopped in his walk as if he found this difficult. 'It may be quite a time,' he said slowly, 'before things get better. It isn't desperate for me, because there's always some corn to be ground, and there'll be enough of it to give me a living. But these aren't times for a man to set up new in this trade.'

'No.'

It was short and terse, and Phillips nodded as if he understood.

'That hits at you, doesn't it?' He turned suddenly, full-face to the other. 'I know you don't wish to be a clerk here all your life, and I think you're right. You're worth something more. And don't think I'm trying to be rid of you, because I'm not. You're too useful. But in fairness to yourself, I don't see much prospect for you. There aren't any openings, just now.'

'No?' Shaw was looking him straight in the eye, and he

sounded disturbed. 'Then what does this mean?'

'No more than I've said. You can stay here as long as you wish, but if you see anything that looks better, I'd advise you to take it.'

'Thanks.' Shaw spoke slowly and he still sounded disturbed. 'I'll think it over.'

'There's no hurry. I only meant that you might be looking out. Now, what's all this?'

His tone changed abruptly as the children who had been by the canal came rushing excitedly at him. He gave them his attention while they told him in noisy chorus that the boat had come from Liverpool. It had taken three days to come, and there were two men with it, and——

'Two men?' He interrupted cheerfully. 'And where's it going

to? All the way to Leeds?'

'It's stopping at Wanless. It's full of cotton, and it's come across the sea in a ship. The man said so. And at Liverpool

they put it---'

'That's enough, Susie. You're getting too excited.' Their mother's leisurely walk had brought her to the group now, and she turned calmly to her husband. 'They must really learn not to shout at boatmen, John. They've been asking all sorts of questions.'

'They say it's cotton for Wanless. Is it for your brother, do you think?'

'I haven't the slightest idea. If Nicholas buys cotton, he doesn't tell me about it. Now it's time those hands were washed.'

Her interest had turned to the children again, as it usually did. They and her husband were her interests and mention of her brother had roused no response at all. But Robert Shaw, quiet in the background, found a darting thought which stirred him to excitement before it faded. The brother was Nicholas England, who in the little town of Colne, a mile or so away. was a cotton spinner with a fine new factory; and Shaw, with his mind disturbed by these warnings about the corn trade. was toying for a moment with the thought that the cotton trade might offer him something better. Then the thought died again as his cool good sense regained control. There was no reason at all to think that Nicholas England had a vacancy for anyone. Nor, even if he had might he be a safe man to work for. He had risen in the world by taking risks, and he could fall as quickly as he had risen; which did not make him a safe employer.

'Tea in ten minutes. You'd better be thinking of it your-

selves.'

Susan Phillips spoke in her matter-of-fact tone, and then she went briskly along the path to the house, sweeping the children in front of her. The men followed without haste, and by the pool they halted, looking again at the water.

'I suppose it's risen an inch,' said Phillips. 'Somebody seems

to be doing all right, though.'

'Who?'

'I was thinking about that fly-boat.'

'Oh, the cotton?' The mention of it roused thoughts that had died away. 'Do you really think it's Mr. England's?'

'No. I don't think he buys cotton direct. He lets the middle men take that risk. Somebody like Barnard Crook. Now we'd

better go for tea.'

That included Shaw, who had been living in his employer's house these last two years, an arrangement that kept him close to his work and enabled him to save a little money. Compared with many he was comfortably placed, and the notion that he should look for something else was not to be rushed at. But it had disturbed him. His thoughts kept circling round it; and after tea, having no present work to do, he decided to go out for an hour. He borrowed a horse from the stable, and in the warm sunlight he rode lazily away. There was no particular place that he wished to go to, yet he found, almost at once, that he was riding up the towing path of the canal, and he knew

that he was in search of the boat that had gone that way. There was no reason why he should, but one way was as good as another and this was as pleasant as any. It would bring him to a place called Wanless, where the boat would be.

He passed by a set of locks, where the canal lifted to a higher level, but still there were green meadows round him, peaceful in the evening sun. He rode unhurriedly, letting the horse find its own pace, and as he passed under a bridge, dipping his head to be below the stones, his interest quickened. He could see to Wanless now, to the widening of the canal and another bridge that crossed, and certainly there was a boat at the wharf. But that was all, and his glance grew suddenly keener. This was not quite what he had expected.

He came to it slowly, his horse lazy in the June evening, and at the beginning of the wharf he halted, sitting motionless while he looked round him. Certainly it was odd. The canal lay smooth and quiet with only the darting insects to ripple the silent water. The boat, with its hatches open and its cargo plain to see, was silent and deserted, with no sign of its crew or anybody else. A wagon stood on the wharf, loaded high with the bales of cotton, the white fluff peeping through the hessian wrappings, but this too was deserted. The horses had gone and the wagoner had gone, and here was an idle wharf in golden sunlight, though these were times when a man with work to do was expected to be at it while the light would let him. There were plenty to take his place if he would not.

His eyes took in the wider prospect. In front of him, at the end of the wharf, a bridge spanned the water, steep and narrow, and beyond it was the only building in sight. It was all but hidden by the bridge, and slowly he walked his horse through the arch to see it better. It was an ale-house on the far bank of the canal, and its sign of the Grinning Rat sufficiently declared it to be a boatmen's house. It was in the full sun now, with the light glinting on the stones and the flamboyant sign, but its door was shut and only a wisp of chimney smoke gave hint of life within. The men from the canal-boat might be there, but nothing was to be seen or heard of them.

He walked his horse under the bridge again, to the wharf and the wagon with the bales, and now another detail took his eye. Cotton bales were a common sight in Colne, and they were always round. But these were square, and he did not understand why. He thought it an oddity, and he did not see a reason for it.

A thud of hooves on a grassy track broke into his thoughts, and he turned to look. A stream called the Wanless Water was only some fifty yards away, and by the bank of it ran the track the wagons would use when they took the cotton into Colne. It was a rough thing, hardly more than the ruts the wheels had made; but the grass between the ruts was a riding track, and a single rider was coming up it now, slowly and lazily in the evening light. One glance was enough for recognition. This was Barnard Crook, and without haste Shaw turned again to the wharf. He thought this explained something.

He knew Barnard Crook by name, as everybody did. He had a shop in Colne where he called himself a linen draper, but he was a good deal more than that. He was quiet and unobtrusive, and much wealthier than he looked. He was a regular importer of cotton, and all the chances were that he owned this cargo; which might explain why unloading had been stopped. It had perhaps been left like this to let the owner look it over. Then another thought occurred as Shaw looked again to the bales on the wagon, packed square instead of round. He was noting how they lay together, with no space wasted. That should be true in a ship as well, and it might be the way of Barnard Crook to have thought of such a detail.

He turned his head again as the lazy hooves drew close, and then he waited. He had never spoken with Barnard Crook, but he was very willing to. Crook knew everybody, and his interest, if it could be had, might be very useful, especially to a man who had just been warned to find another niche in life. There could be nothing lost by knowing him.

'Oh ho!' Crook spoke cheerfully as he came close. 'It's young Shaw, isn't it?'

'I'm Robert Shaw.'

'You're clerk to Phillips, aren't you? How's the corn trade?'

'Middling. Folk have to eat.'

'I doubt if you're getting rich on it, though. But I mistook you when I came up. I thought you were Nick England.'

'Who?'

Suddenly the thing began to fit together. Crook was an importer of cotton; Nicholas England was a buyer of cotton; and it looked as if they were to meet on the wharf tonight to discuss a deal, which was why the cotton had been left exposed

and the boatmen sent away. It began to make sense, and it might mean something for Robert Shaw, too, if he could play the cards correctly. He had an excited feeling that a chance was coming, if he could only seize it, and quickly he was considering what he knew of Nicholas England. The man had a reputation. He had come to Colne some twenty years ago, an 'offcomer' as they called it, and his rise since then had been like the apprentice in the storybooks. He had taken work with Thomas Thornber, the wealthiest of the early cotton men. and within two years he had married his master's daughter. That had led him into partnership with Thornber, spinning cotton with machines in a new factory. Then, as Thornber's son grew up. Nicholas England had left the partnership, and now he had his own new factory, finer and bigger than the other. It was the perfect story of the lad from nowhere who had found the road to fortune, and now he stood high in the cotton trade of Colne. He could open doors if he chose to, and again there was a tremor of excitement in Robert Shaw. He had been glad of the notice of Barnard Crook, but Nicholas England could be worth a dozen of Crook.

'I said Nick England.' The calm voice broke in, answering his

question. 'You know him, don't you?'

'I've never met him.'

'Haven't you? He's Phillips's brother-in-law.'

'He doesn't come to Greenfield much. I suppose he'll be buying that cotton?'

'Depends what he'll pay for it. I've known him with some funny notions about price.'

'Close, is he?'

'Try a bargain with him. There's two sides even to business, and he sees only one of 'em.'

'I suppose that's not new in the world?'

'There's plenty like him. But what's teasing you about that cotton?'

'I was wondering why the bales are made square.'

'You've noticed that, have you?' The voice sounded suddenly approving. 'Can't you guess?'

'They pack well together.'

'Good!' It sounded even more approving. 'Do you know much about cotton?'

'Only what I can see.'

'You seem to see more than some do.' Again the tone

changed, and now he seemed only to make talk in a summer evening. 'That cotton there—it was shipped from New Orleans, which is in the growing lands, and I watched my details. I watched the market, to buy when it was low. Then I made sure it was shipped in May. You needn't pay insurance in the summer, if you have an oak ship and a sober captain. So that's what I did, and then I made them pack it square. You can save near twenty per cent of your space that way.'

'And of the shipping charge, I suppose?'

'Always watch your details. That's how to sell cheap, and that's how to succeed in trade.'

His tone had hardened suddenly; and then he turned in his

saddle to look Shaw straight in the eye.

'Remember that when you're on your own. If you want to keep your trade you must learn to sell cheap. That's what matters when the lean years come.'

'But I don't happen to be in trade on my own.'

'Any chance of it?'

'Not with Phillips.'

'Then isn't it time you thought of something else?'

It came suddenly, like a challenge, and Shaw sat his horse stiffly while his thoughts went whirling and the talk of the afternoon came back. It was the same advice again, and he had almost a feeling that the Fates were conspiring. A tide seemed to be flowing which would bear him away if he did not hold fast to prudence. Decisions of this sort, he reminded himself, should not be taken in a hurry. Nor should they be taken for him by someone else.

'Oh, I've thought of it.' His voice was carefully steady as he answered. 'But corn's the only trade I know. That, and a bit of farming.'

'Farming's no use. There's not a farmer round here who can even pay his rent. You'll have to think of something else.'

'What?'

'That's for you, isn't it?' Crook wheeled his horse suddenly, putting his back to the canal. 'But it wouldn't harm you to think about cotton. That's where the money is, these days.'

'I've heard of men made broke in that trade too.'

'And you'll hear of some more before you've done. There'll be plenty of those, but it's still the trade for the man who's good enough. Who's yonder?'

His tone had changed abruptly. From a fringe of trees, a hun-

dred yards away, two riders had come into view, jogging comfortably up the track. They were a man and a woman, plainly in no hurry, and the man must surely be Nicholas England.

'Who's with him?' said Crook.

'I'm told he has some daughters.'

'If you'd keep your eyes open when you're at church, you'd see he has.'

'I don't go to church. I'm an Inghamite.'

'I won't hold it against you. But that's not his daughter. That's a grown woman.'

'I don't know who she is.'

His tone hinted that he did not care either. The riders had turned now, heading directly to the wharf, and already he had recognized Nicholas England. Whoever might be with him mattered nothing, but the cotton master was important. He could do a lot, if he chose to, for a young man in search of something, and this seemed the moment. Shaw was giving his full attention to that.

'We'll soon see who she is,' said Crook.

2

MISS ENGLAND

'Evening, Crook! Is it hot enough for you?'

The riders were closing now, and there was a cheerful wave of greeting from Nicholas England. His voice came strong and resonant, with something of amusement in it, and suddenly a smile was leaping across his face. He seemed willing to conduct his affairs genially, and already there was a response in Barnard Crook. He looked less stolid now.

'Aye,' he said. 'It's fine enough.'
'Brought your partner with you?'

The question flashed back, and his glance at Shaw was quick and penetrating. Nicholas England looked lean and strong, a loose-limbed man whose easy bearing could mask his vigour. He was some forty years of age, assured and confident, and his easy humours did nothing to hide the masterful spirit in him. His forehead had wrinkles of amusement in it, and his bushy eyebrows seemed to add to the effect. He had a big jutting nose and a lean and humorous mouth, wide and straight, which could perhaps shut like a steel bar when he wished it to, though now it was relaxed and sensitive. It was a friendly face, with tolerance in it, and good nature; but the signs of something in reserve were unmistakable.

'No, he's not my partner.' Crook spoke quietly as he answered. 'He's Robert Shaw, from Greenfield. He's clerk

there.'

'To Stick-in-the-mud?'

'Now that's no way to---'

'You mean Phillips, don't you? Well, that's what he is, and we both know it. Though, mind you, I've known 'em worse

than Phillips. How about Podgy, hey?'

He had turned his head suddenly, flinging the question to the woman who had come with him, but she was given no chance to answer. Barnard Crook spoke first, and his tone was a blend of amusement and reproof.

'You're getting worse, Nick. Who's Podgy?'

'My other brother-in-law, young Thornber. Phillips is a bit slow, but he's a March hare next to Podgy.'

'You shouldn't talk like that about your brother-in-law.'

'Why not? My in-laws are a damn queer lot, but Podgy's the queerest. Have you seen him eat?'

'No, and I don't want to.'

'I don't blame you.'

'We came here to talk about cotton.'

'So we did. Have you met my sister?'

'Sister?' Crook was turning politely to her. 'I've met Mrs. Phillips, of course, but I didn't know you'd another sister.'

'I've rows of 'em. This is the youngest.'

'Glad to meet you ma'am. This is—er—Mr. Shaw, ma'am.'
Rather belatedly Crook swept his hat to her, and Shaw
hastily followed, giving attention to her for the first time.
Certainly he would not have guessed that she was sister to
Susan Phillips. They seemed to have nothing in common. But

sister to Nicholas England she undoubtedly was. The whole cast of face was the same, even to the eloquent eyebrows, though they were finer and more delicately arched in her. Even, in some subtle way, her bearing seemed the same, and for an instant he wondered if she was of the same odd disposition. Then, before he could pursue that thought, Nicholas took the talk again, and his glance now was to the cotton bales.

'All right,' he said briskly. 'What are you showing me here?

Weeds and sweepings?'

'I'm showing you cotton,' said Crook calmly, 'and it's the best they had in Magnolia.'

'It always is, till it gets to the scutching room. What are you asking for it? Fivepence?'

'In a happy mood tonight, aren't you? A joke every minute.'

'Well, what are you asking?'

'Elevenpence a pound, and it's worth it!'

'Let's have a look.'

He swung lightly from his horse, and Crook followed more heavily. Together they walked down the wharf in the slanting sunlight, and they were quiet and businesslike as they plucked tufts of cotton from the bales and turned to the light to see them better. Shaw sat motionless on his horse, knowing that this was not his concern. Yet he liked Nicholas England. Even after this short meeting he liked him, and he knew there was a power in the man. Whether he meant it or not, there was a force coming from him, and it was a force that would win him friends. The man radiated something.

A rustle of grass set him turning quickly, and it was the sister who was at his side now. He had utterly forgotten her, and she had walked her horse forward without his even being aware of her. Now she was at his side, a slim lithe figure, full in the sunlight, and astonishingly like her brother. She had the same lean face with the sharp nose and humorous mouth, the same strong eyebrows and widely spaced eyes, the same high forehead with the wrinkles of amusement in it. At this moment the wrinkles were quivering and there was a suspicious twitch of the eyebrows as she watched him.

'I beg your pardon,' he said quickly. 'I'd forgotten you.'

'Oh dear!' Her eyebrows rose, just as her brother's had done, and he was sure it was deliberate. 'Now that wasn't well said.'

He was looking at her blankly, not knowing what answer he

could make. His wits seemed to leave him as he saw her in the sunlight, strong and vivid, possessed of something he had never known before. He looked into her eyes, grey under the arching brows, and the force he had felt from her brother was coming a hundred-fold from her. He sat rigid, while he felt his breath unsteady, and he knew that never again would he make that mistake. Never again, throughout all his life, would he forget her.

'I beg your pardon,' he said slowly. 'Miss-Miss England,

is it?'

'Of course.' She spoke in the same cool tone as her brother.

'I'm Anna England.'

'Yes.' The name was ringing through his thoughts, splendid and melodious to his hearing, and still his wits seemed far away. 'I didn't know that Mr. England had another sister.'

'You just heard him say he has rows of 'em.'

'Oh-of course. You being the youngest?'

'The last of the litter.' She was looking at him solemnly, and there was the faint twitch of an eyebrow. 'That's how Nick

puts it.'

She turned away, looking down the wharf to where the men were in talk by the wagon, and as his glance followed hers he saw them walk across to the boat that lay alongside. They stepped aboard it and began to clamber into the open hold.

'Oh, your brother?' He spoke more calmly now, and with a hope that his wits were returning. 'It isn't a good way for him

to put it.'

'But do you know my brother?'

'I hadn't met him before.'

'Well, if you meet him again, don't expect him to say all the right things. Because he won't.'

'I'm beginning to guess that. But I certainly hope I shall meet him again.'

'Why?'

It came like a flash, and it left him floundering again. He could think of several reasons why, and sister Anna was the first of them, but he could hardly say so at the moment. He took the first thought that came.

'He-er-looks most attractive.'

'I'm glad you think so.'

She leaned back in her saddle and gave a perfect demon-

stration of how like him she was. For a moment there was an impish smile on her face, and then she spoke more seriously.

'I'm surprised you haven't met Nick before, if you work for

John Phillips.'

'I don't think he comes to Greenfield very much.'

'I'm quite sure he doesn't.' For an instant the smile flickered again, and she seemed almost sardonic. 'I don't think he and Susan find a lot to talk about. They aren't exactly alike.'

'No.' The thought was with him that Susan and this Anna were not alike, either. 'In fact, I shouldn't have guessed——'

'Perhaps you wouldn't.' Her quick smile hinted that she had understood. 'But I wasn't speaking only of looks. Nick's a cotton man now, and it seems to be a different world. Susan stays with corn, and it's what she's always known. Our father was a cornmiller.'

'Oh?' He looked away, down the wharf again, and Nicholas was on the deck of the boat, intent on a tuft of cotton he was holding in the sunlight. 'Then how did your brother come to the cotton trade?'

'Well——' The sardonic air was suddenly back with her. 'He did marry his employer's daughter, and I expect that helped.'

'It was Mr. Thornber's daughter, wasn't it, of Vivary Bridge? But how did that happen, if he was bred to the corn trade?'

'It's natural, isn't it?'

'I wish I knew why.'

'Do you?' She glanced at him oddly, as if she had suddenly sensed that he was in earnest about this. Then, in a cool clear voice, she answered him soberly. 'You put a corn mill by the river, don't you, and the water turns the wheel?'

'Of course.'

'Isn't it the same with cotton? You spin cotton by the river, too, because the water turns the wheel, and Nick says that if you want a man to learn cotton-spinning, an old corn man is best. He knows the water-wheels, and nobody else does.'

'I hadn't thought of that. But the water-wheels do need a man who knows them. They can be dangerous if you don't.'

'They're wicked.'

For a moment she sounded almost grim, and he stared in surprise.

'I'm a miller's daughter, and I've been in and out of the mill

since I could first run. I expect I know the wheels as well as you do.'

'Perhaps better. My father was a farmer, and I didn't take

to milling till I'd left home.'

'I expect you've learned.' Her cool tone seemed to dispose of the matter, and then there was a sudden change. 'Do you know Mr. Crook?'

'Not really. He's well known round here, of course.'

'Nick says he's an Armenian Jew.'

'He certainly isn't.'

'Of course he isn't. That's not the notion at all.' The ripple swelled to a little laugh. 'Nick just means his way of bargaining.'

'Oh, of course.' Again he was speaking hurriedly, as he tried to keep pace with her. 'I expect he holds out for his price, but why shouldn't he? I'd probably do the same myself.'

'From the look of you, you certainly would. And he'll have earned his money if he gets the better of Nick. Hark at 'em!'

The two men had stepped ashore from the boat and they were standing together on the edge of the wharf, deep in talk. The murmur of their voices came clearly in the quiet evening. Then suddenly there was a pause, and they stood silent while Nicholas stirred a stone with his foot and kicked it into the water. He straightened himself, and there was a quick nod, another of response, and at once a handshake that even seemed to have some warmth in it.

'They've done it,' said Anna. 'Let's hope they like it.'

It looked as if they did. They came strolling up the wharf together, amicably, side by side, and Nicholas England's voice had the tone and ring of his sister's.

'All right, he was saying. 'Tenpence farthing it is, to be

weighed when delivered.'

'Then you can get ready for weighing. I'll have it out of here by tomorrow.'

'You'd better. I don't call it safe like this. There's a sight too

much thieving these days.'

'They don't come out here to do it. They're a bit too hungry, most of 'em, to come as far as this.'

'They stick to embezzling weft, do they?' He swung round suddenly, and the smile leaped across his face again as he caught his sister's eye. 'Been having a little chat?'

'Very pleasant, thank you.' She answered him calmly. 'I've been getting to know Mr. Shaw. Have you finished?'

'Except for Crook's small-talk.'

'Then hadn't we better go? It must be eight o'clock, and I don't trust your Betsy an inch.'

'What's wrong with the lass?'

'The way you bring her up.' She turned suddenly to Shaw, and amusement was in her eyes again. 'Mrs. England is away just now, and I'm looking after the children. That's what this is about.'

'I'm sure they like it.'

'I'm quite sure they don't. They have to do as they're told with me, and that's new to them.'

'But surely-er-their father-'

'He spoils 'em to death. Specially Betsy. That's the trouble.'

'Stop fretting, lass.' Her brother broke into the talk again. 'Betsy's all right.'

'Well, whether she's all right or not, it's time she was in bed.'

'That's Susie's job.'

'I don't trust Susie either. I know what girls of fifteen are like. I've been one.'

'And a damned little nuisance you were.'

'Thank you kindly.' She leaned back in her saddle, her face alive with laughter. 'But I wasn't spoiled, you may remember. I wasn't even spoiled by you.'

'I don't spoil anybody.'

'You spoil the whole lot of 'em. And as for Betsy, if that child isn't in bed when I get home, she's going to feel a hair-brush. I've told her so.'

'Oh hell!' He turned in mock dismay to Crook. 'Always trouble with women! Have you noticed it?'

'I'm not telling. How old is Betsy?'

'Just turned ten. She's a grand lass.'

'She takes after you, doesn't she?'

There was a soft chuckle from Anna, and then she was nodding agreement.

'That's exactly it, Mr. Crook. Betsy's the image of him, and that's why she can't go wrong. It's just his vanity.'

'Is it?' Betsy's father swung round on the instant, as lithe and alert as his sister. 'Now I'd have said that if there was one person that Betsy takes after, it's you.'

'As a damned little nuisance, do you mean?'

'No.' The speed of it had left him floundering for a moment.

'I mean in looks, as you very well know.'

'Oh?' She sat smiling affectionately at him, and then her tone grew softer. 'Well, coming from you, Nick, I'll call that a compliment. You could hardly say more. Thank you.'

'What creatures women are!' He was sardonic again at once, and his eyes moved round the group of them. 'How about it,

Shaw? Have you any sisters?'

'Me?' He had to pull his thoughts together quickly. 'Oh yes, I've three.'

'Like this one?'

'No. I ____ I mean____'

He stopped, suddenly aware that this was difficult, and at his side there was a soft creak of leather as Anna moved in her saddle. It set him turning to look, and she was full-face to him, poised and smiling, and her eyes seemed to shine like stars as they looked directly into his. His breath faltered, and whatever he had been trying to say went utterly from him. He had seen no one like her before, and all that counted at this moment was to look at her.

'Lord help us!' Nicholas spoke suddenly, and his look matched his tone as he turned to his sister. 'I believe you've done it again.'

'Oh?' Her eyebrows quivered wickedly. 'I don't understand

you in the least.'

'You wouldn't, of course. What have you been doing while I talked to Crook?'

'Having a talk with Mr. Shaw—about cornmills and water power.'

'I hope he liked it.'

'I expect he did.' She nodded cheerfully, very much at her ease. 'Also, I like Mr. Shaw.'

'Now what does that mean?'

'Well——' She hung on it for a moment. 'He's certainly a change from Podgy.'

'Good God!'

'You aren't supposed to say that. It's bad for the children.' She swung round suddenly, beaming at a discomfited man who felt far from flattered by a comparison with Podgy. 'Perhaps we shall meet again, Mr. Shaw. I shall be here for a day or two yet.'

'I hope so,' he answered fervently. 'But won't you be coming to Greenfield? You'll be visiting your sister, perhaps?'

'I'm not sure that Susan approves of me.'

'Oh, but surely-er-'

'Well, one never knows. But thank you for a pleasant talk. Nick, I think we ought to go.'

'What's the hurry?'

'Betsy. I've told you what I'll do if she isn't in bed,'

'Susie will have put her to bed.'

'I wish I were sure of it. I happen to know your Susie.'

'You're not thinking of using a hairbrush on her as well, are you?'

'You wouldn't mind if I did, would you, with Susie?'

'Well-Susie's a nuisance. Her mother spoils her.'

'Satan rebuking sin! I still think we ought to go.'

'One moment, please.'

He turned, and in the fleeting instant the man had changed. The jesting tone had left him, and he was looking steadily at Barnard Crook.

'What was it you were telling me about this lad?'

'About Shaw?' Crook roused himself suddenly from a watchful silence. 'I was telling you he's had about enough of corn milling. He may be the man you want.'

'Perhaps.' The tone conveyed nothing, but he had turned again, and his deep-set eyes were gazing steadily at Shaw. 'You know my trade and where I do it?'

'Yes.'

His mind was suddenly in turmoil again as the thought returned of the Fates conspiring to drive him forward. For a moment the instinct of caution had him, bidding him hold back and consider. Then, at his side, a saddle creaked for the second time, and Anna was there, half smiling now, and the thought of her swept through him like a warm sea wave, driving all else out. All thought of caution went, native though it was to him, and he knew that he was set upon a path, and it must lead to Nicholas England. There was no other path to Anna.

'Yes.' He swung hastily from his saddle as he remembered that Nicholas was still afoot, and then he answered the question almost laconically. 'Cotton spinning. The new factory at Water-

side.'

'St. Helen's mill, we call it. But you say you're clerk to Phillips?'

'These two years.'

'It does happen that I've need of a clerk.'

'I-I see.'

'Not what you wanted?' The question flashed across, and then the lean face had an understanding smile. 'You'd like the throstle room, would you? Or is it the buying and selling?'

'Buying and selling.'

'You're showing some sense, but you can't do that till you've learned the trade. Then we'll see what you're fit for. Now there's another thing——' He paused, then spoke more slowly and his eyes were keen. 'I won't have it said by Phillips that I tempted his man away without his knowing. It's a thing I don't do. So you'll please have a word with Phillips, before we go further with this.'

'As a matter of fact, we've had such a word—this afternoon.'

He explained it briefly, and Nicholas nodded.

'It was probably good advice,' he said slowly, 'and fair of him to say it. I did tell you I've met 'em worse than Phillips. But it doesn't look as if he expects you to go this week?'

'Oh, no.'

'Then you'll have a word with him, as I've said. When you've done that you may come to see me. Do you know my house in Colne?'

'In Market Street?'

'Yes, Cumberland House. Call on me one of these nights

and we'll talk again. The sooner the better.'

He was curt and authoritative about it, and his nod seemed to dispose of the matter. Then the easy mood was back with him as he looked up to Anna, who was still erect in her saddle, cool and elegant, quite unconcerned with all this.

'Are you ready?'

'Perfectly.' She gathered up her bridle, and then looked down smiling. 'I shall have to say good night, Mr. Shaw. It's time I dealt with Elizabeth.'

'But who, please, is Elizabeth?'

'Betsy, of course. When I call her Elizabeth she knows I'm not pleased. Good night! Good night, Mr. Crook!'

'Good night, ma'am!'

Crook came gravely from his silence to answer her, and he swept his hat politely as Nicholas, already mounted and waiting, ranged alongside her. Then they were away together, unhurriedly, in the sunlit evening. The padding of the hooves

receded, and the wharf was quiet again; and to Robert Shaw it was lonely, too, now that she had gone.

'Well, well!' said Barnard Crook.

'Yes?'

He was watching the slim shape of her as she passed into the fringe of trees, and his thoughts were not with Crook. A cough hinted that they had better be.

'I beg your pardon.' He spoke quickly. 'I'm afraid I didn't

hear you.'

'You looked as if you didn't.' There was a twinkle in Crook's eyes now. 'I was thinking you've had a lucky evening.'

'I'm quite sure I have.'

His eyes were scanning the fringe of trees again, until another cough recalled him and he turned to find Crook watching him steadily.

'If I were you, I'd take it seriously.'

'Of course I shall.'

'I meant Mr. Nicholas England.'

'Well, who else could you mean?'

'I really couldn't say.' Crook paused, and then the twinkle died from his eyes, and they were very shrewd and watchful. 'Now listen. The cotton trade is a tricky beast to ride, a very tricky beast. He's thrown a lot of folk, and he's going to throw some more, and if you're to ride him for long you need the right hands. Nick England was born with 'em, and he's riding very comfortably.'

'Yes?'

'That's what you're to watch, because there aren't many like him. So mark his ways, and see how he does it. If you can learn how he rides the beast you won't be wasting your time.'

'No. But-thank you.'

'Oh aye.' He seemed to sweep that aside. 'I don't know what you were born with, but one of these days you'll find out. We all find out sooner or later. It takes some folks quite a while, though. Now I'd better be off. It's not too safe in Colne when it gets dusk. Good night to you!'

He climbed without haste into his saddle, and trotted easily away. Again the fall of hooves receded into silence; and on the wharf stood Robert Shaw, who had ridden out this evening only to take the air and with no thought of meeting anyone. He moved to his borrowed horse; and then, with his hand on

the bridle, he stopped, and turned again to see the wharf. The shadows were lengthening now, spreading across the grass from the wagon and its square white bales, and the water was black and silent. He stood staring, and he heard the faint plop of something stirring in the water, but he gave no heed to it. Nor were his thoughts with Nicholas England, and the chance that was offered at St. Helen's mill. It was Anna who had his thoughts, and he could see her again upon the wharf, slim and vivid, bringing grace and life to the golden evening. The quiver was in her face, and she was flinging back her head to bring the sun upon it as she turned to her brother with her mischievous answers. The likeness between them was not of feature only. There was an affection between them, and a likeness of mind, and they took no pains to hide it.

The horse stirred suddenly, rearing its head in impatience, and he turned on the instant, his other hand warily on the bridle. But all was well, and he turned again to the wharf for a last look. He was seeing more clearly now, and was disposed to give thanks to God, and not for Anna only. Nicholas could mean almost as much as Anna, for he was the road to Anna.

He was perhaps the only road to Anna.

He mounted and slowly turned his back on the wharf, jogging down the towing path again towards the Greenfield mill; and for a moment his thoughts were of Barnard Cook, who had been a kindly man, and had spoken that word to Nicholas England. It had been a short word, but it had changed his whole world, and it ought to be remembered. He was marvelling now at the chances of it, knowing that if he had not been in talk with Crook he would have had no talk with Nicholas; and certainly none with Anna.

THE IRONMONGER

THE corn mill at Greenfield stopped again next morning. It ran for an hour, and then stopped for want of water. Once again there was a clatter of clogs as the men went trooping home; and Robert, paying them for a full week's work they had not done, hoped that they were appreciative of John Phillips. Slow he certainly was, but there was a decency in him, and a kindliness, which at this moment were an embarrassment. Robert had had his own share of kindness from Phillips, and to tell the man now that he meant to leave him might have its difficulties. It had been Phillips' own suggestion, certainly, but that was not the full answer. He could hardly have expected quite such haste, and it would need explaining.

There was nothing to be gained by waiting, so when a glance through the windows showed Phillips out in the sunlight, standing alone by the pool, Robert came suddenly to his feet. Phillips heard him coming, and he turned from his contemplation of the trickling water.

'All done?' he asked quietly.

'I've paid the hands, as you told me to. But there's something I wanted to tell you.'

He went at it doggedly, and Phillips heard him patiently. He was stroking his chin thoughtfully as the tale ended, and he seemed to be seeking for words.

'Do you think you're wise?' he said at length. 'I've told you I don't want to stand in your way, but do you know much about this cotton trade? Why leave the corn trade, just when you've learned the way of it?'

'Because I think there's more in cotton. It's a new trade, when it's done by machines, and there's room in it for some new men.'

'With yourself as one of them? Well, I wish you luck, but cotton isn't a new trade, even by machines. They've had mules and throstles these last fifty years.'

'Those are for spinning. It's weaving by machines that will make all the difference. There isn't a power-loom in Colne yet,

but they're coming, and they'll change everything. It could be a roaring trade, one day.'

'You seem set on it.' Phillips cut him short and then went to a different point. 'Granting that the cotton trade will suit you, are you sure that Nicholas England will? Is he the right man?'

'Why shouldn't he be?'

'I don't really know. Of course, he's my brother-in-law, and I oughtn't to be saying anything against him, but he mightn't be exactly stable. I fancy there's something of the gambler in him. And I've heard he takes more brandy than a wise man would.'

'I've heard that of a good many, these days.'

'Specially men like England.'

'Why?'

'I suppose it's the life they lead. Men of that sort seem to think they're building a new age. More and more machines, all going faster and faster, and of course they spend their days going faster and faster too. They're always hurried and always worried, and they've forgotten how to take any rest. Do you wonder it isn't good for them? But did you say he had a sister with him?'

'The youngest, he said.'

'Anna? I hope you liked her.'

'I certainly did.'

'Then perhaps she's improved. Of course I don't know her well, but it seems the parents died when she was half grown, and then she was in first one house and then another, round her family. I fancy she spent a lot of time with Nicholas, and perhaps that's why she apes him so. We must tell Susan that she's here, though.'

'Certainly.' The answer came a little stiffly. 'But you seemed to be warning me against something, and I wasn't quite sure

what.'

'I think he's perhaps unstable, and it makes me wonder what sort of employer he'll be.'

'I suppose I shall find out when I get there.'

'Wouldn't it be wise to find out before you get there? You might have a word with Hoyle.'

'My brother-in-law? But why in the world should I ask Joe

Hoyle? He's an ironmonger, not a cotton man.'

'I fancy he's a good deal more than that.' The answer came calmly, as if Phillips were sure of his facts on this. 'You don't

go to Colne much, except to your chapel on Sundays, and you've perhaps missed learning that Hoyle isn't only an iron-monger. His shop and his factory give him a bread-and-butter trade, but he doesn't live by them. He's willing for anything that comes, and he'll put up money for any sort of deal if he can see a fat return.'

'I've heard something of the sort whispered.'

'You can take it from me that it's true. Hoyle makes more money that way than he ever does out of his pans and kettles. But the point is that he knows all that goes on. It's his business to know, and if anyone knows about Nick England, Hoyle will. It's lucky he's your brother-in-law. So off you go and find him.'

'Now?'

'Why not? Don't go to his shop, by the way. Try the Hole i' th' Wall. He likes a drink before his dinner.'

'You seem to know more about him than I do.'

'That's quite possible.' There was a hint of amusement in Phillips now. 'The fact is, Shaw, that if you would occasionally lift your nose out of that chapel of yours, and take a sniff round the world instead—especially the places where the world drinks and talks—you might learn something. I'm suggesting that you start now.'

'Thanks.'

'And to save you from getting it wrong, I'll tell you that Hoyle isn't wasting his time in the Hole i' th' Wall. You'd probably think he is.'

'I know some men do business in taverns, but---'

'He isn't exactly doing business. He's just picking up the gossip there, and he'd call it time well spent.'

'Why?'

'Because that's how he and a few others learn what's in the wind, and whether there's a deal in prospect that can be helped along. There's no place like a tavern for hearing tales, if you pick the one where men of your own sort go.'

'I suppose I should have known all this about him.'

'You aren't in the town as often as I am.' The friendly smile had appeared again now. 'I have to strike a few deals myself, so I know how it's done. If anyone can tell you about England, it'll be Hoyle, so away you go. You'll have a chance to see your sister, too.'

'I'll be glad to see Jane, of course.'

'Then take the chance while we're quiet.'

Robert was away within minutes, striding vigorously along the wagon-road across the meadows till he came to the turn-pike that led to the straggling town. It was an oddity of a town. It lay on a high ridge of ground that rose steeply to the eastward, and it was little more than a single street of taverns and houses, shops and workshops, all intermingled without thought or plan. Little side streets ran down towards the adjoining valleys, packed with tiny houses, jammed side to side and back to back, and if any thought had been given to the building of the town, it had perhaps been given here; houses for folk to live in could hardly have been built more cheaply.

The steepest of the hill was at the bottom, and it made hot walking in the June sun. He took it without haste, thankful that here there were no buildings and that a breeze could come to him across the fields. He passed through a toll-bar, and then, ahead of him and pleasantly out of the town, was the parsonage, clean and new. Beyond it was the crumbling ruin of what had once been a manor house, then another toll-bar, and a Methodist chapel: and thereafter, where the squat tower of the church rose above the roof-tops, the shops and taverns began to cluster thickly. Away to his right, already well below him, he could see the river as it wound past the town, and he was viewing it with a sharp interest. That strip of ground by the river was known as Waterside, and here, where the water flowed to drive them, were the mills, grinding corn and spinning cotton. One of these was Nicholas England's. and it would be a change from placid Greenfield. There were tenements and stenches in Waterside, and a noisy bustle of work.

He went steadily up the hill, and as he came near the church the street was thronged with people, busy with their trades or their shopping, with here and there a horseman, a loaded cart, or a farmer's gig. Just above the church he halted; for here, where a lane led away down the side of the churchyard, was his brother-in-law's shop, a vivid place, flamboyant between its sober neighbours. It was painted yellow, with Joseph Hoyle: Ironmonger written above it in a startling blue, and it certainly took the eye. No one would need to be directed twice to find it. Joe Hoyle had a thruster's belief that to be noticed was good for trade.

He was not there now, as a quick glance into the shop made plain, and Robert went steadily to the top of the hill, where he halted, looking alertly round him. This was Market Street, where the better citizens had their houses. Nicholas England lived here, in a fine and well proportioned house of cream coloured stone, and there was just a chance that Anna might be seen, if she should be out at her shopping just now. But there was no sign of her, and soon he turned aside to the tavern he was seeking, the ancient Hole i' th' Wall, and he made quickly for its unpretentious doorway.

It was one of the oldest taverns the town had. It had been in business for a century or more, and the low stone-flagged ale room had thick old walls, a beamed ceiling, and windows that were none too big. It was cool and dim, hardly touched by the hot sun of the street, and on the stools and settles perhaps a dozen men were at their ease, one or two with brandy and one with gin, but most with the tankards of strong cool beer. There was a drift of tobacco smoke, and a low murmur of voices, breaking off for an instant as the newcomer appeared. Then they began again, and it was a man comfortably astride a stool, with his hands cupped round a tankard, who seemed to have the lead.

'Aye,' he was saying. 'We need the military right in the town. Having 'em at Burnley isn't any good—not to us. It's six miles off.'

'Aye, but---'

'It's young Shaw,' said a familiar voice, and from a settle against the wall rose Barnard Crook of the other night. 'Come in, lad—come in. What'll you have?'

'Well, I----'

'And how's our Robert?' Another voice broke in suddenly, and from the opposing settle the big face of Joe Hoyle was grinning across the room. 'You look damned hot to me. You'll be best with a pint, like the rest of us. Here, get a seat——'

He had taken boisterous charge in a practised style. He was a thickset fellow, still a year under thirty, with wide shoulders and all the signs of muscular strength. He had twinkling blue eyes, and a big jovial face with lips perhaps a shade too thick. But it was his loud voice, his genial looks, and his air of vitality that would give him the attention of any company, and at this moment he was dominating the room. He was beaming on everybody, buying them drinks, introducing his brother-in-law, re-arranging stools and tables, all in the same moment and all with a deft assurance. Then he subsided. He sat comfortably

against the wall and was as genial as before, but he was no longer noisy, no longer imposing himself. He was content now merely to have his place in the company.

'Well?' he said cheerfully. 'What brings you here? I've not

seen you for weeks.'

'I wanted a word with you and Jane.'

'Come for your dinner when you've put another one down.'

The other one arrived at that moment, still foaming from the tap, and again it was Joe who had ordered it. There had been one darting glance from his sharp eyes, as if he had guessed that there might be more to this than a mere social word, but he made no comment. He seemed concerned only with gossip as he spoke across the table.

'Quiet at Greenfield? You've not had trouble there?'

'No.'

'Sounds as if you're lucky. They're talking about soldiers

here.'

'We need 'em.' One of the earlier speakers suddenly took up the tale again. 'We need 'em here, not at Burnley. That's too far off.'

'What's the trouble?'

It was Robert who had spoken, and the man looked at him in surprise. But he answered readily enough.

'Out of work weavers, mostly. They've nowt to do, and

they're getting damned hungry.'

'Is it bad?'

'Just a few stones through windows, but there's more coming, if we don't have soldiers.' He spat forcefully into the sawdust on the floor. 'Thank God I'm not a manufacturer. What are you paying 'em now, Jack?'

'Tenpence,' said a man by the window.

'Aye. Tenpence a piece, and not so many pieces. That's the trouble.'

'Only ten?' Robert spoke slowly as he tried to fit this together. 'I thought it was thirteen?'

'Some of the bigger men are paying that. But with chaps in a small way, like Jack here, it's only tenpence.'

'And that's more than they're worth,' said Jack sourly.

'I see.' Robert nodded thoughtfully. 'Then perhaps it's better to be a spinner?'

'It's a damned sight better.'

There was another nod from Robert as he let the point drop,

but his feelings were of relief that Nicholas England was a spinner, not a manufacturer. For a spinner controlled a mill, but a manufacturer was merely an organizer of other men's labour. He would buy the finished yarn from the spinners and would issue weighed quantities of it to the weavers; which was why he was more usually called a putter-out. The weavers were truly and literally the manufacturers. They worked the yarn, by hand, into cloth. They took it to their homes and worked it on the handlooms there, a sustained and sweating labour for two hands and two feet. It was paid for, when returned to the putter-out, at an agreed rate for the piece of cloth, and this rate had been falling lower and lower. Thirteen pence the piece was a starvation rate, as even Robert knew; and no wonder there was talk of trouble if it had fallen now to tenpence.

'Yes,' he said slowly. 'I can believe that there'll be trouble

soon.

'What do you expect? Well, I'm for dinner. Time's getting on.'

The man clapped his empty tankard on the table as he came to his feet, and at once some others were glancing at the clock too. Joe Hoyle took his moment promptly.

'Aye,' he said cheerfully. 'They're waiting for the power-looms, that's what it is, and those will wait till there's a force in the town. They'd be smashed up if they came before that.

Now, let's see if dinner's ready.'

They emerged into the dusty sunlight, dazzling now at noon, and they turned down towards the church and the house above the ironmongery. They passed through the cluttered shop, threading their way between kettles and pans, spades and hoes the rakes, and then up the dark steep stair behind. Jane looked at them without surprise, and she gave her brother no more welcome than he might have expected.

'Aye,' she said. 'You can have your dinner.'

He was not put out by that. It was not the way in his family to make displays of affection, and least of all was it Jane's way. She was the eldest of his sisters, but she had been married less than a twelve-month, and she had not forgotten the ways of her rural home, where there had been little beyond work and duty, the farm on weekdays and the chapel on Sundays, and a strict control of tongues on all days. Twenty-four years of it had set their mark on Jane, and if she was glad to see her brother she

was not likely to say so. For an instant she stood watching him, young and vigorous, and oddly like himself, with the same slender build, the same firm mouth and high wide forehead. Then she disappeared to the kitchen, and the bachelor brother was left to brood on what he thought was a problem. It faced him every time he met the Hoyles. He did not wholly like Joe, and he did not understand why Jane had married him. He could see some reasons, of course, Jane, at twenty-four, had had enough of home; and certainly, in rural Trawden, her chances had been limited. But there was more to it than that, and Jane seemed not merely satisfied but positively captivated. That was the puzzle to Robert, who found a noisiness in the man, and a blatant self-assurance. But there it was, and it looked as if Joe, for some unfathomable reason, had a way with women; or, at all events, with Jane.

Then Jane was calling them to dinner; and this, as he had hoped, was a family meal, with Jane giving him what news there was. Young Tom, who was fifteen now, was becoming a useful helper on the farm. Mary Ann, who would be twenty next month, was trying to assert herself, and was therefore on difficult terms with her mother. Young Susie, who was just touching fourteen, was begining to watch herself in mirrors and was fast becoming a general nuisance. It was sisterly talk that came to him over the table, and Joe seemed to recognize that he was out of it. He sat mostly in silence, until dinner was ended and he and Robert were alone for a while. For a moment he sat watching, perhaps trying to estimate his man.

Then he spoke quietly.

'What about Nick England? Did you like him?'

'How did you know I'd met him?'

'Crook dropped a hint.'

'What else did he tell you?'

'Not much. He never does. He just said you'd been talking to Nick last night at Wanless. But it set me wondering.'

'As a matter of fact, I did want a word with you.'

He told the tale crisply, and Joe listened in silence, nodding occasionally to show that he had grasped a point. The other half of him was showing now, the half that his noisiness hid so easily, and the gleam of shrewdness was in his eyes as the tale went on. He took his time before he spoke, waiting for a long moment as if he were fitting this into place. Then he went straight to what mattered.

'Is Bradley leaving?' he asked.

'Who is Bradley?'

'Nick's clerk. Dick Bradley. They say he knows his work, but I haven't heard he's leaving. So Nick must want a second clerk.'

'But why?'

'That's guessing. But you can take it that he knows what he's doing.'

'There's my point of view, though, and I'm not sure that it's a wise move. I was talking to Phillips about it this morning, and he seemed to have some doubts.'

'I never knew Phillips when he hadn't. What does he say this time?'

'He has some doubts about the cotton trade. It isn't as steady as corn.'

'It's that sort of trade.'

'That's more or less what Crook said. He called it a tricky beast to ride.'

'It's damn tricky.'

'I don't say I agreed with Phillips, but---'

'To hell with Phillips! If you offered that man a gift horse he'd say it wasn't steady.' Joe moved a little in his chair, and again the man had changed. 'Just forget about Phillips. He knows nothing about cotton, and not much about anything else. You've a chance here in a million, and if you're not a born fool you'll go straight at it.'

'You've no hint of why he needs a clerk?'

'It'll be something to do with markets. Nick's spinning in a big way now. There are nearly four thousand spindles in that new mill of his, and he'll get a lot more yarn from that lot than he can sell round here. These dam' fool handlooms can't use that amount of yarn, and that's his problem.'

'What's the answer?'

'Sell it somewhere else, of course. He must find a town with power-loom factories, and he must under-sell the spinners there. If he does, he'll make a lot of money. If he doesn't they'll sell him up.'

'A dangerous trade.'

'Of course it is. But if you win you can make the money.' The decisive note was suddenly back in Joe's voice. 'But that's his problem, and you can take it from me that he won't have

much else in his mind just now. So whatever he's up to, it will have something to do with that.'

'Including me?'

'Yes. Now when do you see him?'

'Perhaps tonight.'

'Don't say "perhaps". If you keep him waiting you may find there's someone else. Go tonight, and then come across here, if it's not too late. If you can't do that, come for your dinner on Sunday.'

'You mean you want to hear about it?'

'Of course I do.' He paused, and his eyes were looking very steadily at Robert's. 'There might be a lot in this, if we play it right.'

'We?'

'Of course.' Joe spoke calmly and slowly. 'We can stick together, can't we?'

'I hope so.'

'So do I. So you take up with Nick, and learn what you can. He's worth learning from.'

'But you said "we"?'

'You don't want to be a clerk the rest of your life, I suppose?'

'I certainly don't.'

'Well, when you want to set up on your own, that'll be the time for a talk with me. I might back you.'

'Joe!'

'Always ready for a good thing.' There was an almost triumphant smile on him now. 'And when you've had a year or two with Nick England, you'll be a good thing. Got it?'

He leaned back in happy satisfaction, and Robert sat staring. It was so unexpected that he could find no answer.

THE HOUSE IN MARKET STREET

Miss Elizabeth England, whose age was ten, was having a difficult moment. She was face down across her aunt's knee, squeaking loudly while a firmly wielded hairbrush brought retribution to the rounded end of her. She was kicking vigorously, and making a good deal of noise, which had none of the effect she may have hoped for. Her sister Susannah, whose age was fifteen, stood by the window and watched in a careful silence.

'There we are.' The hairbrush stopped, and her aunt spoke cheerfully. 'Get up.'

She did it with a jump and a wriggle, and then she stood rubbing herself ruefully. She seemed not quite sure whether she was in tears or not.

'Next time, Betsy—' The clear voice brought her jumping to attention, her consideration of tears hastily forgotten. 'Next time, when you are told to put yourself to bed and you happen to be left for a minute, you had better go on putting yourself to bed.'

'Yes, Aunt.'

'And not come tip-toeing down here, trying to steal pieces of cake.'

'No.'

'I hope you'll remember it, though I'm not sure that you will. Now then——' The note changed sharply. 'If you aren't in bed in five minutes, you'll get something more. Off you go. And shut the door properly.'

It was shut with ostentatious care, and for a moment there was silence. Then the clear voice spoke again.

'Susie, come here.'

Susannah came obediently forward, a tall lanky girl who was just beginning to fill out and take a shape. She looked a little nervous as she stood in front of her aunt, and the pause that ensued did not make her look happier.

'That was your fault too, wasn't it?'

'No. Aunt. I---'

'You were told to see Betsy into bed. Why did you leave her by herself?'

'I heard something from Nicky's room, and I thought he

might be awake.'

'Oh?'

There was a slight change of tone, as if this ought to be heeded. Nicky was the youngest of the family, a delicate three-year-old who needed a little watching.

'And was he awake?'

'No. But I thought he might be, so I went to look.'

'And when you found he was all right, you didn't go back to Betsy. Where did you go?'

'I-I looked into my own room.'

'Tidying your hair, I suppose? It seems to be your main occupation, these days. You haven't a thought in your head except your hair. Nor had I, at your age.' For a moment a gleam of amusement showed, and there was a suspicious twitch of the eyebrows. Then the level tone went on. 'It's time you learned to do better when I'm about. What your mother lets you do is another matter.'

Below them, in the distant recesses of the house, a bell went jangling, and Anna stopped short, her head thrown back as she listened. Somewhere a door had opened, and feet were

moving.

'Susie, was that the front-door bell?'

'I think so.'

'Then if it's your Uncle Thornber again, you can go and talk to him yourself. I'm not going to.'

'What am I to say to him?'

'Tell him I've gone mad and they've locked me up. It'll

soon be true, if he keeps on coming.'

There was a splutter from Susie, who was now looking distinctly happier. She went running to the window, which was open to the summer evening, and she thrust her head and shoulders out as she looked down past the stone sill. Then she turned to the room again.

'It isn't Uncle Podgy,' she said.

'Thanks for small mercies! Who said you might call him Podgy?'

'Everyone else does.'

'Including you, I suppose? Are you allowed to push your head out like that, for everyone in Market Street to look at?'

'I was only trying to see---'

'I know what you were trying to see.' Again she broke off to listen, as somebody opened the front door and a murmur of voices was heard. Then she turned slowly to her niece again. 'Well, if it isn't Podg—— if it isn't your Uncle Thornber, you'd better tell me who it is.'

'I don't know him.'

'A man, is it?' The sharp clear face became a little sharper. 'Go and ask who it is.'

She sat without movement as Susie disappeared through the door. Then, with sudden energy she was on her feet, first for a long searching look into the mirror above the mantlepiece, and then for a quick glance round the room. She put a chair straight, and on the table she gathered her workbasket and the rose-pink cushion cover she had been embroidering. Then, as Susie's quick feet came up the stair, she took her chair again.

'It's a Mr. Shaw,' said Susie. 'He's asking for Father.'

'Shaw?' The eyebrows contrived to look puzzled. 'Your father isn't home yet, is he?'

'He's still at the mill.'

'Ask him to come up. We'll have to be polite to Mr. Shaw, Susie, and it will be a good exercise for you. Go and fetch him.'

She was on her feet this time before Susie was at the door. Again she took a keen glance round the room, and then she moved her chair to the window, where the best of the summer light would fall upon it. She drew a small side-table next to it to take her workbasket, and then, with the cushion cover in her hand, she seated herself comfortably. She was sewing by the open window when Susie came in with Robert, who looked tall and hot, and not altogether at his ease.

'Good evening, Mr. Shaw.' Without any haste she came to her feet. 'We met the other night, didn't we? I'm afraid my brother isn't home yet, but we expect him at any moment. Please sit down.'

'If I don't intrude.'

'Of course not. Susie, could you find a glass of wine for Mr. Shaw?'

'Yes, Aunt.'

'Now do sit down, or I shall have to stand up with you, and it's too hot.'

He sat bolt upright, and for the moment he was content to watch her as she seated herself again, charmingly at her ease,

and surely with a radiant friendliness in her. At the other side of the room Susie had opened a bow-fronted walnut sideboard and had produced a decanter and glasses. She moved confidently, and seemed to know what to do. Then he remembered that it was time he said something.

'It's been a hot day, ma'am.'

'Hasn't it? But it's pleasant in here now, and Susie and I were just—er—talking things over. Ah, here she is.'

Susie had come across with the wine, a strong sweet port, and she set the glass carefully at his side. Then she turned inquiringly to her aunt.

'For you too?' she asked.

'Er—no.' It came with cool precision. 'But you may go down and ask Sarah to make us some tea. She may bring it to us here.'

'Yes, Aunt.'

Susie disappeared once more, looking pleased at being included in this, and Anna had a faint smile as she watched her go. It was broadening as she turned to her guest.

'An interesting child,' she said calmly. 'She's coming to an

age when she can be useful, if she's made to be.'

'Of course.' It had just occurred to him that he was alone with her now, and he must certainly do his share in this harmless talk. 'Is she the eldest?'

'No. Tom's the eldest. He's down with his father at the mill. But Susie's the eldest daughter. Then there's Fanny, but she's away with her mother just now.'

'Ah, yes.'

'Then Betsy, who takes after her father and is therefore the most spoilt of the lot. I don't think she quite approves of me.'

'Oh, surely?' He was watching her intently, unable to imagine that anyone could not approve of her. 'I feel quite sure she does.'

'Then you don't know Betsy. Perhaps you don't know me either.'

'Well-er-not very well yet, of course. But I hope to.'

'Do you?'

The remembered lift of the eyebrows came with that, and it upset him completely. It left him in doubt of her thoughts, uncertain of everything, until he saw the smile come to her face again. He felt himself gasp with relief as he saw that she was not unfriendly, and hurriedly he tried again.

'I think most of us would wish---

The door opened sharply and Susie came briskly in, still looking pleased with herself. She spoke cheerfully.

'Sarah says the kettle's boiling, and she'll bring the tea in

a minute.'

'Susie, you're interrupting.'

'Oh, I-I'm sorry.'

'For once, you look it. I expect Mr. Shaw will forgive you.' 'Of course.'

He said it quickly, but it was not precisely his feeling. At that moment he could very well have done without Susie and her talk of tea, but he could hardly say so. It had seemed a heaven-sent chance to be alone with Anna.

His face showed nothing as he turned politely to her.

'And is Betsy away with her mother also?'

'Oh no.' Her answer came as promptly as if this had been their only talk. 'Betsy's in bed upstairs. At least—I hope so.'

'Is there a doubt of it?'

'There's always a doubt with Betsy. She's like her father.'

'I'd have said it was you who is like Mr. England.'

'Would you?' The smile was lighting her face again. 'Some other people have said it too.'

'I'm not surprised. I should think Betsy must be very pleasing.'

'I wender why you say that? Susie---'

'Yes, Aunt?'

'Go upstairs and see if Betsy's properly in bed. If she isn't, come down at once and tell me. And don't go running off somewhere else this time.'

There was a nod from Susie as she went to the door and Anna seemed to settle herself a shade more comfortably. She looked very much at her ease now.

'I'm sorry if I interrupted you, Mr. Shaw. But you were saying?'

'I was saying that Betsy must be pleasing. If she takes after her father, she must be like you also.'

'Oh, I see.' She accepted it quite calmly. 'That's very pleasantly said. But I'm afraid it wouldn't be the opinion of all my nephews and nieces.'

To his intense annoyance there was interruption again. A knock sounded on the door, and it was pushed open by a young

parlourmaid carrying a tray of tea. She put it carefully on the table.

'Thank you, Sarah. Did you bring some biscuits?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'Good.' She turned placidly to him again as the girl went out, and she seemed to ignore the tea altogether. 'I'm not sure that they would agree with you at all.'

'The nephews and nieces? You have several, I suppose?'

'Thirty-seven.'

'What!'

'Children do arrive, you know.'

'But thirty-seven?'

'I'm the youngest of twelve. That can account for a lot.'

'They're all married, then?'

'All but me. I'm the odd one out, as usual.'

'I'm surprised, if I may say so. I'd have thought, if-if you

don't mind my saying it—that a lot of men---'

'Oh, yes.' She sounded very brisk and cheerful. 'Bids plentiful, but quality poor. So I stay as I am, much to their disapproval.'

'Whose disapproval?'

'The family's. I'm twenty-six, and they're afraid they'll end by having to keep me. Except Nick, of course. He never minds anything.'

'From you, that is?'

'Or anybody else, really. He says quarrels aren't worth while, and they only make folk hot.'

The door swung open again as Susie returned. She came

across the room as if she had something to say.

'You've been quite a long time, Susie. Wasn't the child in bed?'

'Oh, yes, she's in bed. But she's pulling faces, and she hadn't said her prayers.'

'Then what did you do?'

'I had her out of bed and made her say them.'

'I hope she feels better for it.'

'I don't think she does.'

'Nor do I, and I don't know what Mr. Shaw will be thinking.' She turned to him as calmly as ever, with the quiver of amusement in her face again. 'This is what happens when you look after other people's children. There's always something to see to.'

'You've done it before, I suppose?'

'I'm always doing it. Susie, does your mother let you pour tea?'

'Not often.'

'Not when guests are present, you mean. Well, that's precisely why you are going to do it now. It will be good for you. I beg your pardon, Mr. Shaw. What was I saying?'

'That you were always doing it.'

'Oh, about the children—yes.' She nodded, and the smile returned to her. 'Of course, an unmarried sister has her uses in a family. They don't pay me the compliment of saying so, but they all know it. So if mother falls ill, or there's another one due, or somebody wants to go away, they can always send for Anna. It's pretty well the family motto.'

'And what happens?'

'Anna always goes. Unless, of course, she happens to be somewhere else.'

'You like it?'

'I have to like it. It's more or less how I earn my living. Thank you, Susie.'

She took the proffered cup, and she was sipping at it carefully when the front door opened noisily. Feet sounded from below, and a murmur of voices, and then the door banged shut again.

'Here they are,' said Anna. 'Noisy as usual. Go and meet them. Susie.'

Susie went out, and the voices were heard again. Then there were feet on the stair, and a moment later Nicholas England was in the room, as vivid and dominating as before. He looked tired now, but he was still very much himself as he spoke.

• 'Evening, Shaw.' His voice was as resonant as it had been. 'Glad to see you. How's it with you, Anna? Where's Betsy?' 'In bed.'

'Good. Give me a drink, Susie.'

He had spoken over his shoulder as Susie appeared in the doorway with a slender good-looking lad who was obviously her brother. She nodded and went at once to the sideboard.

'Hadn't you better have something to eat?' said Anna.

'Good Lord, no. I can't be always eating. I'm not hungry.'
There was a clink of glass from the sideboard, where Susie
was mixing brandy and water, and Anna made no argument.

'Very well,' she said quietly. 'There's something ready for

Tom. Susie will see to him.'

'Splendid. Thanks, lass.' He took the wide and well-filled glass she had brought him, and the lightning smile was suddenly with him as he looked at her. 'We couldn't do without you, could we?'

She had a glowing smile for him as she went across the room and beckoned to her brother. They went out together, and

Nicholas took half his brandy in a single movement.

'That's better,' he said, and he looked quizzically at his sister, 'Did you think we were never coming?'

'I had Mr. Shaw to talk to, and Susie.'

'Good.' He yawned openly, as if he were more tired than he looked. 'I'm glad you came, Shaw. I must see Betsy first, though. She'll be wondering where I am.'

He drained the rest of his brandy at a gulp, and put his

glass quickly on the sideboard.

'See you in a minute,' he said cheerfully.

He went out, and Anna laughed softly as she took her chair

again.

'That's the way of it,' she said. 'He must always see his Betsy before he'll do anything else. It's because she takes after him. She's like him in her ways, too.'

'Then I still think Betsy must be attractive.'

'Oh?' Again the eloquent eyebrows showed that she was alert, 'I've told you that opinions differ.'

'I still maintain mine.'

'Yes?' She spoke coolly, and seemed to look him over carefully. 'You look as if you would. It might be a way of yours. Betsy has it, too.'

'At her age?'

'Haven't you dealt with children at all? But let us just say

that Betsy takes after-her father.'

Her head had gone back, and for a moment she showed very plainly what her own looks were. Then, before he could sort this out and find an answer, there were feet on the stair again, and Nicholas returned.

'She's asleep,' he said ruefully. 'She'd nothing to say to me.'

He wandered across to the sideboard and began to refill his glass, and he looked good-humoured enough as he sent the brandy splashing into it.

'You, Anna?' He paused, with the decanter still open.

'I've some tea here, thank you.'

'Shaw? What's in your glass? Port?'

'I think so.'

'Well, don't you know? Put it down, man, and have another.'

'Er-not just yet, please.'

He was not used to heady wines, and he had been prudently leaving it alone. For a moment he felt awkward about it, but Nicholas made no attempt to press the point. He came strolling across, glass in hand, and he pulled a chair round with his foot.

'Just as you like,' he said easily. 'But let's have a talk.'

He stretched his legs comfortably as he sat lazily back. Then he came to the point quickly enough.

'Have you talked to Phillips?'

'Yes. He'll make no difficulties.'

'He's not a bad fellow, as far as he goes. The trouble is that he doesn't go far. Now do you understand that it isn't a safe trade that you're coming into? I don't want you to think that if you join me you'll be safe for the rest of your life—because you won't be.'

'I didn't suppose it.'

'You'd better not.' The eyes were very clear and there was certainly no mincing of words. 'It's an unsafe trade, and if I get sold up—I don't *think* that will happen, but it could—if I get sold up, you'll be out of it, and I shan't be able to help you.'

'I should no doubt help myself. It's what I've had to do so far.'

'And quite right too. Also—' Again he paused for a moment. 'I suppose you do know that for the next few years we aren't going to be a trade much liked in the town? You know there's trouble expected?'

'With the weavers?'

'Yes.' The answer came grimly. 'They've made trouble before, and now they're boiling up for it again. I'm not sure that I blame them much, either.'

'Oh?' He spoke sharply, finding this surprising from a cotton

master. 'You mean you approve?'

'Of course I don't. But hungry men turn nasty, especially if their wives are hungry too, and the kids, and there's no point in being surprised at that.' 'I'm told they're in a bad way.'

'They're dam' near starving. They've been hoping their trade would pick up, and now they know it won't. That's the short of it. Their living's leaving them.'

'Handlooms being out of date?'

'They're dead.' Nicholas spoke with curt finality. 'So there's going to be trouble.'

But surely that applies only to the weavers? I'm told your

trade's spinning?'

'Starving men don't think, and only a fool would expect them to. Machines are the enemy, and spinners use machines. That's as far as they'll get, and we can expect some trouble.'

'I think I can chance that. At all events, I'd feel safer with

you than with other men.'

'Don't be too sure. One or two mistakes can finish anybody, in cotton.'

'But you haven't told me yet what my work is to be.'

'I've said I need another clerk. I'm sending letters all over the county these days.'

'I see.' The thought came pressing that Joe had been right, and that this was indeed a search for new markets. 'I had hoped for a little more than letters, though. You did seem to speak as if I could learn the trade.'

'You will, if you're any good. You'll be ten times as useful if you can write a letter on your own, without keeping me there to dictate it, and that's why you'll need to know the trade.'

'Thank you.' He leaned back in his chair with relief. 'For

my part I'm satisfied, and I'm glad of the chance.'

'It's up to you to show what you can make of it. If it goes well, you'll find more here than in the corn trade, even though it's not as safe. As a matter of fact, I doubt if the corn trade is quite as safe as Stick-in-the-mud thinks it is.'

'Why not?'

'Because before long it will be steam in that trade, too, and that means a lot more mills, and if Phillips wants his trade he'll have to go out and look for it. That'll shake the fat off him.'

He was chuckling genially as he heaved suddenly out of his chair and took his empty glass to the sideboard. With the dacanter in his hand he spoke crisply.

'I think it's settled, then. Now, when can you come to me?'

'I ought to give Phillips some decent notice.'

'Of course you must. I don't want the man to have a griev-

ance. Give him a full week, and then come to me. We'll settle the details when you're with me, and we'll fix your wage too. For goodness' sake, man, finish that port.' He sounded suddenly impatient, but the smile was on him as he turned to his sister. 'Anna, it's time you had one too. Isn't there something here to lift a glass to?'

'Well, perhaps there is.' She seemed to come suddenly alive again, and at once she was smiling back happily. 'Have you the Sharm mine?'

the Sherry wine?'

'You need a biscuit with that.'

'They're here.'

She reached for the forgotten tea-tray as he turned briskly to the sideboard; and then, as he brought the wine to her, she came to her feet to take it.

'Thank you.' Her smile was broadening as she took the glass, and her vivid presence seemed to fill the room. 'To you, Mr. Shaw! To your happiness and success!'

The glasses rose and clinked, and then she was watching Robert again, while the amusement seemed to come back to her, and her forehead wrinkled. He knew he must make some answer.

'Thank you. I hope that you'll hear of me again, Miss England. And I hope that we shall meet again.'

'Oh, I expect we shall. I keep coming and going.' She sounded cheerfully offhanded about it, and the smile had become teasing. 'Next week I'm to be in Bingley, in Yorkshire. My eldest brother lives there and his wife's to lie in, so Anna will look after the children. Anna always does.'

'But you'll come back here?'

'I always come here when I'm asked.' For an instant she was looking affectionately at her brother. 'I like it here. You're the best of them all, Nick.' The smile was still with her as she turned. 'So that's how it is, Mr. Shaw. I come and go. And I go next week.'

'To Bingley? Then let me wish you a happy time there.'

He spoke quietly, masking a disappointment. There was plainly no more to be said. His business here was done, and he had no excuse to linger; nor could he press her with further questions. He must take his leave and go, and he would be wise to do it gracefully, and before they thought him tedious.

'I'd better go,' he said firmly. 'It's some way back to Green-



field. Good night, Miss England. I shall look forward to hearing of you.'

'Thank you.' She looked him clearly in the eye. 'If you're working with my brother, you probably will hear of me—one way or another. Good night!'

It was Nicholas who led down the stair, and in the hall, as he opened the outer door, he had a brief word at parting.

'I'm glad you're joining me,' he said. 'I'd not advise it to every man, but you look as if you've a brain in your head—and you'll need it. It's that sort of trade. It takes all you have, but in the end it does pay what you're worth. Now good night! Have you a stick?'

'Why no. But my thanks for---'

'If you're going to walk this town at night, get a stick, and put a bit of lead in the end. It's safer. Good night!'

The door shut behind him, and then Robert was in a street that was losing light as the dusk closed in. It was far from empty, and there was noise in plenty from the taverns. There were men in each, and more men standing outside in little silent groups, as if they lacked even the coppers that would take them in; but no one interfered with him as he went quickly on, and he was too sunk in thought to give heed to the men who stood and talked. There was an excitement in him now as he thought of what the future might hold, first with Nicholas England, and then perhaps in some venture of his own. But that must wait, and he put it firmly aside. It was Anna who had his first thoughts now, and only through her brother was she likely to be found again. If only for that, he must hold tight to Nicholas and the St. Helen's mill. She must hear of him through Nicholas, and hear of him often.

Her image was before him as he went down the long steep hill that would bring him to the river and the Greenfield road, and he remembered the music of her voice, and her cool unflustered way with Susie. Soon she would be in Bingley, with another brother's children; and suddenly he was angry that she should be the odd one out, and have to give her youth and charm to the children of others. She ought to have her own children, and her own house. It was her due.

The rest of it semed obvious, but his face had stiffened as he came to the bottom of the hill and turned away along the meadow road. He was not short of confidence, but he knew he had a long way to go. Nor was he sure what Anna's views would be. In his short acquaintance he had not found her predictable.

5

TALK AFTER CHURCH

THE Inghamite Chapel was in Colne Lane, and no one could say that it was easy to get to. The lane ran steeply down from the market place to the huddle of buildings on Waterside, and it was roughly paved with cobblestones, round and treacherous. In dry weather it called for care. But on a wet day, with the water streaming on the stones, and usually a film of mud as well, is was no better than a slide; and more than one of the brethren, stepping with dignity in his Sunday boots, had ended on his back, to the hurt of both his trousers and his person. Some similar mishaps to the ladies were better not talked about.

The Inghamites, however, persisted. They were determined folk, with some strong notions of duty, and Sunday by Sunday they arrived at their chapel. They had a meeting in the morning and another in the afternoon and nothing but illness was reckoned an excuse for absence. It was admitted, indeed, that some of them lived too far away to be back in the afternoon after going home for dinner, but this was provided for. Such folk were expected to bring a cold meal with them; and Robert Shaw, who at Greenfield ranked as a distant member, usually ate with these others in the chapel house. But on this Sunday he had been bidden to dine with the Hoyles, and he thought he might as well do so. Also, he would have a little time to spare between the morning meeting and Jane's dinner, and

at that hour of a Sunday morning the main street was a meeting place for everyone. There could thus be a chance, if he timed it nicely, of seeing something of Anna, who would presumably be at church with Nicholas and the children. The thought of it was exciting, and there could be nothing lost by letting her see him again. It would at least remind her of his existence.

He timed it perfectly. The street was thronged with people as he walked down to the church, though not all of them were churchgoers. There were more idlers today than he would have expected, little groups of men with their hands in their pockets and their eves on the churchyard, and at once he remembered the groups by the taverns when he had come this way last night. Then, as he approached the churchyard gate, all thought of them went from his mind. There, on the path to the gate. was Anna, in talk with a man. She was in the centre of the path, and the youthful Susie was at her side. A vounger girl, who must surely be the Betsy he had heard of, was at Susie's other side, and beyond her was the brother who had been addressed as Tom. To complete the circle was the man who was talking to Anna, a young man, perhaps not yet thirty, but much too heavy and thick in the face. It was a sluggish face. hinting at a mind that might be much too sure of itself, and the rest of his bearing supported this. There was something truculent in the stance of him, heavy and massive, with his feet planted apart as he stood firmly on the path in possessive talk with Anna, she as slim and elegant as he was everything else. They made an odd pair, and the watcher in the street stood very straight and still. If Anna found the fellow pleasing. Robert did not.

His gaze shifted for a moment, and at once another group of talkers took his eye, a ring of men on the grass between the gravestones, and one of them was Nicholas England. At his side, as quiet and attentive as he, was Richard Sagar of Carry Bridge, who had been a worsted manufacturer and was now a cotton spinner of some importance; but it was the others in the group who were talking, and they seemed to be explaining something while the two spinners gave careful heed. Then, on the churchyard path, Anna turned her head and saw Robert standing in the street. Instantly there was the remembered quiver of the eyebrows, and her head was a little to one side, poised and alert, as the smile came upon her. In the same

moment she moved towards the gate, seeming to pay no heed at all to the man at her side. For a moment he talked to nobody, and then his mouth dropped open in consternation before he came heavily after her. Behind him, Tom and Susie exchanged quick glances, and then linked arms as they followed.

'Good morning, Mr. Shaw!' She met him at the gate, and her voice was as cool and clear as ever, with the little twitch of the mouth that hinted at amusement. 'Are you from church too? But do you know Tom Thornber?' She indicated the man who had followed her. 'Mr. Thomas Thornber junior, I should

say. He's my brother's-er-brother-in-law.'

He knew the name well enough, and for a moment he was thinking quickly while he sorted this out. Old Thomas Thornber, who had built the first real spinning mill in the town, was still alive, but he was nearly eighty now, an invalid whom nobody ever saw. His daughter Ellen was Mrs. Nicholas England; and this Thomas junior, born late in his father's life, was her young brother. He was therefore brother-in-law to Nicholas. A further thought suggested that he must also be the Podgy whom Nicholas had spoken of the other night, and one look at him told why.

'Of course I've heard of Mr. Thornber,' he said, 'but I

haven't met him before.'

'No?' She turned lightly to Thornber. 'Then I suppose you don't know Mr. Shaw?'

'Never heard of him.'

'Then it's time you did.' She sounded calm and placid. 'Mr. Shaw is to work with Nick, down at the mill. He's joining cotton.'

'Is he a fool?'

'Why should he be?'

'If he wants to come into cotton he'll have to be.' He swung suddenly to Robert. 'It's a daft idea, and you can take that from me. The trade's going to hell. Look at 'em.' His quick gesture was to the groups of men by the taverns. 'A crowd o' lazy good-for-nothings, yelping for more pay than they're worth. What's taken you, to come into cotton?'

'You'd better ask Mr. England. It's his notion.'

He jerked his head to where the ring of men had been in talk on the grass, and then he stopped short in surprise. The group had broken up, and Nicholas had come forward unnoticed. He was standing not six feet away, an interested listener, and there was a gleam of amusement in his eyes as he spoke to Thornber.

'Something troubling you?'

'Aye, that lot of ale-supping rogues.'

'They don't seem to be supping much just now.'

He turned abruptly, and the gleam had gone from his eyes as he looked at the little groups of threadbare men who lingered opposite by the White Horse and the King's Head. Then he raised a beckoning hand.

'Two of you, over here.'

It was imperious, but there was an easy note in it. Across the street there was an exchange of glances, and then two men were pushed forward by their fellows. They came slowly, awkward and suspicious, and Nicholas met them in the churchyard gate.

'How long have you been over there? All morning?'

'It's our own time, isn't it? We can stand here if we want to.'
'Don't be a damned fool. Have you been there since breakfast?'

'Aye, we have.' The man spoke firmly now. 'For them that's had a breakfast.'

'Handloom men?'

'We used to be.'

'You needn't tell me. But it's a poor thing when you have to wait in the street.' His voice was suddenly imperious again. 'Now—inside the White Horse, the lot of you, and it's bread and cheese and ale. Tell 'em the old fool's paying for it. That means me.'

He fished in his pocket and produced suddenly a golden sovereign, bright and gleaming in the sun. In the same quick movement he threw it, and the startled man caught it, and then stood staring as it lay in his hand.

'Ave, but what's this?' he said. 'I dunno that we--'

Twe told you once not to be a damned fool. If you don't want it, the others do. Now, off with you.'

'Aye, but-but lads would want me to thank you.'

'All right, then. Tell 'em I'm getting soft. And don't forget the cheese. It won't do your bellies any good to sup hollow.'

He stood watching, with his face inscrutable while the men retreated; and a faint smile, which could have meant anything, was with him as a surge of men made for the beer-house, some shy, some with a wave of thanks, but all hurried and eager. Then he turned, with the smile broadening; and Tom Thornber, red-faced and angry, stood glaring at him.

'Well, of all the dam' silly---' He sounded almost beyond

speech. 'I reckon you've just about said it.'

'Said what?'

'Gettin' soft, and I could think of a bit more. Buying ale for that bunch of blue-nosed—' For an instant his voice rose, and then he seemed to subside into a helpless shrug of his shoulders. 'Oh, have it your own way. But don't blame me for what comes.'

'Some things are unusual.'

'And some are daft, if you ask me.'

'I don't.' For a moment his voice was a little sharper, and then the gleam was in his eyes again. 'If I were you, Tom, I'd be off home and put the shutters up.'

'What the devil do you mean?'

'Shutters. Things that cover windows. There might be a few stones flying by tomorrow.'

'Then why the hell aren't the soldiers here?'

'Because they don't come till it's started.'

'Don't sound so dam' pleased about it.'

'Well, you saw me in talk just now with Ward and Lonsdale and the rest. They say they're stopping tomorrow—stopping giving out, I mean.'

'I could have told you that.'

'Since you're a putter-out yourself, I suppose you could. Thank God I'm only a spinner. Are you stopping your men?'

'I dam' well am. And about time, too. They've given us trouble for months past.'

'I fancy they're a bit hungry.'

'Do 'em good.'

'It might do several of us good.' For a moment his eyes were sardonic as he looked at Podgy Thornber. 'But perhaps not weavers, Tom. They've been hungry for quite a while now, and that isn't good for men.'

'If they want to eat more, they'd better work a bit more.'

'That's going to be difficult, isn't it, if you won't give them any work?'

'We're going to teach them a lesson. That's all.'

'I hope you're right. But I still think you'd better put the shutters up.'

'Are you going to?'

'Well——' He turned his head, and for a moment he was inscrutable again as he looked to the door of the White Horse. 'Well, no. I don't think I shall.'

'My God!' Thornber was standing at the door too, as if he had just understood. 'Is that why you did it?'

'As a matter of fact, it wasn't. But it may be useful.'

'You damned old fox!'

'Maybe. But I still think you'd better put those shutters up. Now, we're going home—aren't we, Betsy? We want our dinners.'

He sounded as if he had had enough of it, and was ready to sweep them all in front of him. But Anna was of another mind, and not disposed to be hurried. She slowly adjusted her gloves, and then she looked up with the same leisurely air.

'Well, good morning, Mr. Shaw. I've enjoyed our little talk.'

'Oh—er—so have I.' His wits seemed to have left him again, and he was casting round for something to say. 'You'll be leaving us soon?'

'Bingley.'

'I'm afraid I don't know Bingley.'

'You haven't missed much.' For an instant the eyebrows lifted delicately. 'I hope you'll look happier when we meet again.'

'I certainly shall.'

'So shall I. I shall have left Bingley, you see. Good morning. My love to my sister Susan.'

Her smile was pure mischief as she turned briskly to her brother and linked her arm in his. Then they were away; Betsy in front, stepping out with hungry vigour; then Tom and Susie, decorously side by side; then Nicholas and Anna, arm in arm, prayer books in their other hands, precisely as was expected at return from church on Sunday. Only the slightest tilt of her head gave hint that she could have other thoughts. They passed through the gate, and the sounds of their feet died away. Silence came to the churchyard, and Robert stood in the sunlight hearing nothing and seeing nothing, his whole mind filled with Anna and the tilt of her head as she marched through the gate.

'Well, I'm damned!'

The disgusted voice at his side recalled him to earth. Tom Thornber had his mouth half open as he stared at the deserted gate, and his boot scraped on the path as his feet moved heavily. He turned in the same moment, and their eyes met. 'Well, I'm damned!' he said again. 'What was she talking about?'

'Dinner.' Robert answered curtly, anxious only to be rid of

the man. 'I expect she thought you were hungry.'

'She's right, too.' The dull eyes brightened suddenly. 'I'm fair clemmed. Well, I'll be off.' He heaved himself into motion and went rolling down the path. Then at the gate he stopped again, and stood staring up the hill. 'Where's she going to?'

'Bingley. She has a brother there.'

'I hope he clouts some sense into her. Remember what I said about cotton. Keep out of it.'

'Ave, ave. Remember about the shutters, won't you?'

But there was no answer to that. Tom Thornber was rolling broad-footed down the hill on his way to home and dinner, and Robert heaved a sigh of relief to find himself alone. Then he remembered that it must be sister Jane's dinnertime too, and that she would not lack for words if he kept her waiting. Also, he wanted a word with Joe, and this seemed the time to have it.

Yet he need not have hurried. Jane received him in her own brusque way, and promptly told him that Joe was not

there.

'He'll be in for his dinner,' she said gruffly. 'You can talk to me instead. You'll have to come in t'kitchen, though.'

He went with her willingly enough, knowing that she must be in her friendliest mood to ask him to the kitchen. She kept him in talk there as she bustled about the dinner, and she soon had the whole tale from him of his intended change of work. Then there was an interval of silence before she nodded her head sagely.

'You're doing right,' she told him firmly. 'You'll do a sight better for yourself in Colne than stuck out there at Greenfield.'

'That's just it, Jane. It's the way the corn trade's going.'

'Aye and it's the way Phillips is going too. If you're staying with him, you might as well go to sleep till they wake you up and bury you. Where are you going to live?'

'Live?'

'Well, you can't go on at Greenfield, can you? You always did need someone to think for you. I'm going to keep an eye on you.'

'Why?'

'Because in your own silly way you're good-looking. Has anyone told you that?'

'Of course not.'

'Well, if anyone does tell you, you can bring her here and let me have a look at her.'

'Jane, what are you talking about?'

'You!' There was a bang of a saucepan on the hob as she swung round to face him squarely. 'You were all right down at Greenfield, because there's nobody there. But you're going to be in the town now, with a pretty face at each corner.'

'I'm not interested in pretty---'

'That's the trouble. You've never looked at anything yet but a cornmill and the chapel. Of all the holy innocents!'

'Really, Jane!'

'Aye, but it's true, you know.' A grim smile had come to her now, and it was amusement and affection together. 'But don't think you aren't going to be noticed in the town, because you are. It's a queer face you've got, and it might stop the butter coming, but some of those wenches'll see it a mile off—and like it too. So I'm keeping an eye on you, and you can lodge just up the street.'

'Who says I can?'

'I do, so you can just save your breath. I'll tell Joe to have a word with the widow Briggs. Now, stop moidering me, or you won't get your dinner. You'll be all right with Sally Briggs.'

'Why am I to go to Sally Briggs?'

'Because I can keep an eye on you there. I'm not going traipsing a couple of miles every time I want to look at you.'

'Nobody's asking you to. As for this Sally Briggs, I'll decide that for myself.' He was watching her very steadily now, knowing only too well what a trick she had of arranging everybody's affairs. 'Where does the woman live?'

'Do you know Cumberland House?'

'Mr. England's?'

'You've found that out, have you? Well, Sally Briggs is just about opposite.'

'Oh, I see.' He was hurriedly re-arranging his thoughts about it now. 'I suppose that might be convenient.'

'What might?'

'Being—er—near Mr. England. Thanks for suggesting it, Jane. I'll have a word with this Sally Briggs.'

'You can let Joe do that. He knows her.'

'It would be a help if he would. As a matter of fact, he's

been helpful in some other ways. He's certainly made some good suggestions.'

'Suggestions, has he?' The oven door shut noisily as Jane turned to face him squarely. 'Robert, you'd better be careful.'

'What do you mean?'

'Well—' For once she seemed to hesitate. 'When Joe makes suggestions he generally thinks he's going to make some money, and that means himself, not you. So look out.'

'Thank you.' Robert spoke quietly, and they were eye to eye now. 'But Joe hasn't done anything yet except give advice.'

'Aye, that's about all he parts with.'

'All the same, I think he knows what he's talking about.'

'Oh, he knows that.' Jane nodded sagely. 'To give him his due, his head's screwed on right way.'

'Then I may as well hear what he says.'

He heard it a few minutes later. Joe came boisterously home for dinner, and this time he seemed willing to talk over the meal. He was firm in approval when he learned that the decision had been made.

'Good,' he said. 'You're not going to be sorry.'

'England was pretty straight, though. He warned me it isn't a safe trade.'

'The trade's all right. It's the men that aren't. Half of 'em don't know what they're doing, thank God!' There was a broad grin on Joe for a moment. 'That's how you buy spindles cheap, when there's somebody sold up.'

'I wasn't thinking of buying spindles.'

'Not yet. But you'll be all right. Nick knows what he's doing.'

'There seems to be trouble in the town, though. There were some weavers outside the church——'

'They won't be your trouble.'

'Whose, then?'

'Thornber's, mostly. Now, can we come to what matters? First of all, I've been asking about Bradley.'

'Who's Bradley?'

'I've told you once who Bradley is. He's Nick's clerk, and the point is that he isn't leaving. So you'll be doing the letters to the other towns, to see if they'll buy yarn. That sort of thing.'

'I hope it can be a little more than that.'

'More than that?' For a moment Joe's voice rose in surprise.

'Man, it couldn't be better. What more do you want?'

'I want to learn something of the mill and the trade, not be writing letters all day.'

'Aye, but it's the other that matters. It's easy enough to buy cotton, and there's not much trouble about spinning it. I know half a dozen men who can do that—take charge of a mill, I mean—and they're walking about the town today on what's left of their boots. They've been sold up, because they couldn't sell the stuff. That's what matters.'

'I see.'

'In this trade, if you can sell at the right price you can forget the rest. And where to sell is just what you're going to learn. So what about it?'

'I hadn't thought of it in that way.'

'I don't know what you've been thinking about, then. But if you can learn where to sell yarn, and just a bit about spinning it, you're the lad for me, and you'll find that I'm the lad for you. Now then, are you with me?'

'With you?' Robert echoed it while he paused for troubled thought. 'You mean that I should work for England, lead him to trust me, and then break away to take his markets for myself?'

'They aren't his markets. Markets belong to the man who can sell in 'em.'

'It might depend on how it was done.'

'What's wrong with you? In business you make your own way. You don't want to write letters the rest of your life, do you?'

He certainly did not. The thought of Anna was pressing upon him again, and it would be hard to woo her as a clerk. Independence was a burning need in him now, with a rising path in the world, and this could be the way to both.

'Hell!' said Joe suddenly. 'What do you think Nick did? He worked for Thornber. He wed the old man's daughter, and he was one of the family, and that's more than you'll ever be. But it didn't stop him from starting on his own.'

'I suppose it didn't.'

'Then you're paying him in his own coin, and that's all there is to it.'

But it was not all. There was a thought of Anna, and of what she might think if he treated her brother so. She was fond of her Nicholas, and there might be a fighting loyalty in her. There had not been an Anna when Nicholas started on his own. 'Well?' said Joe.

'I think we go too fast. We'll see what happens, and then we can decide. In the meantime, I'm for St. Helen's mill.'

6

OLD NICK

ST. HELEN'S mill stood in the Waterside, not fifty yards from the river, and it was well placed for its work. It stood on flat ground that had once been a green, so that wagons could come to it up the river bank, and it was near enough to the river for a goit to be cut, a channel through which the water flowed to the pool and the wheel; and if the supply should fail, as it might in the summer, there was a colliery just across the river, and coals could be had at the easiest of rates for the two steam engines that would then keep the spindles turning. There were fifty-two weeks in the year at St. Helen's mill.

The boiler was fired and there was black smoke rushing from the chimney as Robert made his way down Colne Lane at a little before seven on the Monday morning. It was a way well known to him on Sundays, for half-way down the lane, set decently back from the road, was the Inghamite chapel, a solid building of smooth-dressed stone, well enough proportioned to achieve a sober dignity. Opposite the chapel, on the other side of the lane, was Joe Hoyle's factory, which achieved no dignity of any kind and was not expected to. Joe had bought it cheap when a previous owner, who had tried to spin cotton there, had found his way to bankruptcy instead; and Joe, as usual, had picked a bargain. It had more space than he needed, but that gave him something in reserve, and in the meantime he was using as much space as he wanted, and using it very profitably.

For Joe, as an ironmonger, was in a good deal more than the retail trade. He sold in his gaudy shop the pans and kettles, and all else expected of him, but here, in this drab dark factory, he made more profitable things, usually to special order: gates and hinges, firegrates and ovens, lanterns and lampbrackets, tools for the farm, or whatever else a man might need in iron. It was largely an out-of-town trade, and Joe had visited many an outlying farm to take the measurements of what was wanted; which was how he had first met Jane in Trawden. He had talked to Robert about chains for a harrow; and Jane had given them tea in the farmhouse kitchen.

But Robert was not thinking of it now. He was not thinking of Joe at all: for beyond the factory was the steepest part of the lane, and below him, clear in view, was St. Helen's mill. with its chimney smoking busily. It was not a handsome building, and it added nothing to the beauty of the scene, but it had not been intended to. No one had thought of anything as silly as that. This was a rectangular two-storeyed building, strong and heavy in the millstone grit that could be had from every hillside, and already the cream coloured stone had turned to a dirty grey on its way to a dirtier black. Yet somehow the building fitted, in spite of the green of the grass and the blue of the summer morning. The grime on its walls told of work to be done, and the pall of smoke that hung above it seemed a hint of energy. It was far indeed from the farm in Trawden. It was a new world, and Robert felt his pulse quicken as he saw it. He believed in a new world, in a fine new world that could be made this way, and there was an eagerness in him as his long-legged stride took him quickly down the hill.

He was not alone. All round him, on the noisy cobblestones of the lane, the mill hands were making their way down. From the huddle of back-to-back houses that sprawled on the green another stream was coming; and from across the river, where the ground rose steeply again, another row of houses was ejecting its stream of workers, all hurrying down. There was bustle everywhere, and the clatter of clogs on stones merged into a clacking roar that seemed to fill the valley. It was a noise that could be made by nothing else, and it was to become a part of his life. It was a communal noise, made by a whole community on its way to work, and it imparted something. It was a heartening noise, rousing them to the mood and rhythm of work; but it was not a noise for weaklings.

It seemed to suit him. It made him throw his head back and quicken his pace a little more, and it even made him for a fleeting instant regret that he was not in clogs himself to add his little to the much. Then, hurriedly, he changed the thought as he remembered that clogs were for the common folk, boots for the better; and between the two the gulf was deep. He was not firmly among the better folk himself, though he would have to be, if he were to have any hope of Anna. Nicholas England's sister would not be allowed to marry clogs.

He came to the green, no longer regretting his boots, and now the mill imposed itself upon him. The whirling smoke from its chimney had been joined by a plume of steam, which seemed impatient, eager to be at work. A door was open, and the workers were pouring in, jostling and noisy. They all but swept him with them, and it was a thought of his boots that made him hesitate and then step hurriedly to the side. There would be another entrance somewhere for the better folk, and he might as well claim that status at once. As usual, he had

a confidence in himself.

He did not need to look far. By stepping aside he had made himself conspicuous, and almost at once another man stepped from the path and came directly to him, a man of his own age, dressed as plainly and decently as himself.

'Morning!' he said cheerfully. 'Are you Shaw? I'm Dick

Bradley.'

'I've heard of you. You're the clerk, aren't you?'

'That and a bit more. I'm the old man's general help.'

'Mr. England? Is that what you call him?'

'Sometimes. Of course to that lot vonder he's Old Nick, and I'm not surprised. He does look a bit like the Devil at times.

There it goes.'

The shrill howl of a whistle, high on the chimney, burst suddenly upon them, deafening and startling. In the same moment a burly hard-faced man appeared in the now empty doorway, and after one glance at the green he swung the door shut as the whistle ended.

'Time we were inside,' said Bradley. 'It doesn't do to be

late.'

The hiss of escaping steam died suddenly away as he led to a lesser door, and another noise began, softly at first and then swelling louder, a rumbling noise, with a shake and tremor to give it power, and the monotonous chuffing of steam-exhausts behind It. It was not the rumble of the corn mill in the meadows. It lacked the deep growl of the stones, but it was a harsher sound, with something of straining and groaning in it, but it was undoubtedly a sound of machinery. It was the voice of the new age, and for a moment Robert halted inside the doorway, his head thrown back as he tried to catch the note of it. Bradley halted too, with a smile on his lean face.

'It's the shafting,' he explained. 'The water-wheel turns the shaft, and the shaft runs right along the mill, and it has toothed wheels on it to turn the other shafts. One of them goes up to the throstles, and you needn't wonder that it squeaks a bit.

You'll get used to it.'

'But aren't we running on steam just now?'

'Yes. But that doesn't change the shaft noise. The engines are next to the water-wheel, and they turn the same shaft.'

He was leading into the counting house as he spoke, but he seemed quite willing to explain matters as he unlocked his desk.

'We don't use steam a lot,' he said. 'It's only in dry weather, or in winter if there's ice about. The old man has his doubts about water-wheels when it's freezing.'

'I don't blame him. I've known men killed, clearing ice from the wheel. Everything ought to be steam in these days.'

'Steam can't do what a good high river can do. There isn't the power in it. Now what do you want to do this morning?'

'Isn't it a matter of what I'm suposed to do?'

'With the old man here it would be, but he's gone to Blackburn. He hasn't said what you're to do, so I suppose you can please yourself. How about a look round the mill?'

'I'd like that.'

'Then I'll look for Sam Hartley. He's our fettler for the throstles and so on. He fettles 'em when they go wrong, and

that's pretty often. I'll go and get him.'

He disappeared, leaving Robert to look thoughtfully round the counting house that was to be his place of work. It was a small room, austere and comfortless, with whitened walls and a bare wooden floor. It had two cupboards against the walls, and a tiny fireplace. A plain and heavy table, with three plain chairs at it, took the centre. Two tall desks were set under the narrow window, with a stool against each. That was all, apart from the inkpots and a row of hooks behind the door, from one of which a threadbare coat was hanging. It was

distinctly a place for work, and there was less comfort here than in the little room that he had used at Greenfield. He put his hat thoughtfully on one of the hooks while he wondered how he would take to it.

Then Bradley was back again, bringing with him a man a year or two older than himself and as different as could be in build. He was perhaps not more than five feet eight, but he made up for it in width. He had great broad shoulders and a mountain of a chest, and his rolled-up shirt sleeves showed arms like hams. He had a round red face with a boyish grin under a shock of unruly hair, and his eyes had both a cheerful twinkle and a penetrating stare. At the moment he was watchful and suspicious, and he looked ready to be either friendly or truculent, whichever the newcomer chose.

'This,' said Bradley, 'is Sam Hartley. Sam, this is Mr. Shaw.' 'Aye, aye.' The man nodded cheerfully. 'I've heard tell of him.'

'There isn't much you don't seem to hear tell of. But can you take him round the mill?'

'Mr. England not here?'

'He's probably in Blackburn.'

'Nice morning for it. What's it like up t'street today?'

'Much like other days. Sam, I've my work to do, so you take Mr. Shaw and show him all you can.'

'Right. Where do we start?'

It made an interesting hour, and they were soon on easy terms. Sam Hartley was no difficult problem. It was merely the boots and clogs again, a fear that he might be patronized or looked down on, and he was sturdily ready to resist it. Robert. of the same awkward breed himself, knew all about it, and under his careful friendliness Sam thawed rapidly. Then he proved an excellent guide. He began in the opening-room, where men were breaking the containing hoops from the tightpressed bales of cotton, prizing the stuff apart and clearing it of stones and rubbish. He was as friendly in the scrutching room, where a machine was beating the cotton to clean it further, and a power-driven bellows was blowing away the finer grit. The carding room followed, and here he was silent, watching with a wary eye as the cotton passed between spiked rollers to have the fibres laid parallel. But all seemed well, and the fine slivers of cotton were next being fed to the drawingframes, there to be drawn to the proper length.

'It's tricky,' he observed calmly. 'If you get a sliver a shade too thin from carding, it'll break when you draw it. That's how you keep the slubber waiting.'

'What's that?'

'This.' He moved to the end of the room, where spindles were droning round on the slubbing-frames, fifty spindles to the frame. 'Gives it a twist, you see. It's ready for spinning now.'

Robert watched with interest as he saw what was meant. The cotton was getting its first twist, and the strength that it would need. It was more like a loose thread now, and a further machine was winding it on bobbins ready for the throstles. The steady drone of the machines seemed to fill the room, with the deeper rumble of the shafting that brought the power; and through it all came the rhythmic clatter of the engines and the puffing of exhausts. It was far indeed from the spinning wheel that his mother had worked with her foot at the Trawden fireside, and when he said so Sam nodded.

'Same wi' us,' he said. 'Mother spinning, and us kids carding the stuff on t'floor wi' a daft little comb! Ever done that?'

'Years of it. Let's see how you do the spinning here.'

They went up a stone stairway, and running with it was the iron shaft that took the power to the upper floor. It was a massive thing, four inches in diameter, held by a greased iron collar every few feet, and spattering grease about as it turned. A great bevel-toothed wheel was sweated to it at the top, engaging another which drove the shafting of the upper floor, and this gave power to the two big spinning rooms where the throstles were singing musically, ten in each room. They were doing a double work, drawing out the thread on rollers to make it fine, and twisting it on the spindles to make it strong, and again Robert watched, fascinated, as he began to take in the details. Then, as he looked at the cops of varn that were winding from the spindles, he became thoughtful. He had not known that it would come in quite this quantity, and it explained the canal-boat full of cotton, and his own engagement here. There was certainly a need for new markets, with this quantity to sell.

'Bit different from Mother, isn't it?' said Sam. 'And mind you, we can do better than this, when we're on water.'

'Don't you like steam?'

'We haven't enough of it. We've two engines, and we could do with three. Would you like to see 'em?'

'Yes.'

But for the moment Sam was in no hurry. He leaned comfortably back against the window, watching the busy scene, and he looked ready to talk.

'You an offcomed 'un?' he asked easily.

'I'm from Trawden. I've been working at Greenfield, though.'

'I thought I hadn't seen you. Where are you lodging?'

'The widow Briggs.'

'Oh, I know her.' Sam rubbed his chin thoughtfully. 'Any trouble up there today?'

'Not that I know of. Why should there be?'

'It's how the handloom lads were talking yesterday.'

'What's wrong?'

'Do you know what they're paying 'em now?'

'I've heard some talk of tenpence.'

'Ninepence now. That's what we've come to. Ninepence the piece.'

'I see.' He answered quietly, and he saw how Sam's face had hardened. 'What's going to happen?'

'They were saying yesterday they weren't having it at that price, and they'd bash anyone's face who took it. Ninepence the piece is pretty dam' serious, if you ask me. Well, shall we see those engines?'

He led below again, and then to an engine-house built against the wall of the mill, next to the water-wheel house, and here, massive on the thick stone floor, were the two new engines, each with its brass-strapped cylinder wrapped in a mist of steam and its piston sliding smoothly in and out. The great iron fly-wheels were whirling and the place shook with the vibration and the pounding. From above the roof came the rhythmic roar of the exhausts, joining with the rest in a din that made talk difficult. A bare-armed man in a grimy shirt, who was holding a hank of oil-soaked cotton against a moving piston, gave no sign of hearing them as they came in.

'It's Amos Smith.' Sam was shouting above the noise. 'He tents 'em. Hi. Amos lad!'

He was shouting through cupped hands, and the enginetenter looked round without haste. Then, with the same deliberate movement, he withdrew his arm from the machinery. He came across to them, and there were some shouted introductions. Then a door at the far side of the engine-house opened, and for a moment a black and sooty face was peering in. It vanished as quickly as it had come, and the door slammed shut again.

'That's Jack o' Dick's,' said the tenter.

This meant Jack the son of Dick, a convenient way of distinguishing between men of the same surname, and Robert took that with an easy nod.

'What does he do?' he bawled to the tenter.

'Shovels coals. Like to see?'

He led across the engine-house and flung the farther door open. They passed through and at once they were in the open air, with the pale-blue sky above them. The boiler-house, built separate from the mill, had its nearer wall some ten feet away, and in this wall was a doorway without a door, a wide unfilled arch, through which could be seen the firebox and rivet-studded end of the boiler. A thick iron-steam-pipe, lagged with felt and strips of wood, ran across to the engine-house, giving out wisps of steam; and inside the arch the long iron boiler was wreathed in thicker steam. The firebox door was open, to give a glimpse of the furious flames within, and young Jack o' Dick's with the sweat streaming on his grimy face, was leaning back to keep his balance as he pushed and pulled at a long two-handed rake to clean the fire. On the strip of ground between boiler-house and mill a great heap of coals stood ready, with a shovel stuck into it, and Robert retreated to the far side of it. The blast of heat from the fire and boiler seemed more than he could bear on a summer morning.

'Warm, isn't it?' said Sam, who had retreated almost as

quickly.

'It's too much for me.' He was watching Jack o' Dick's again, and noting that he had only a singlet and a pair of cotton trousers. 'I don't know how he stands it.'

'Him?' Amos Smith had come to them now, and he seemed

quite at ease in the heat. 'It sweats the fat off him.'

He was quite unconcerned about his helper, who had now abandoned the rake and seized the shovel from the pile of coals. He plied it with a practised skill, flinging the coals into the fire with an expert flick of the wrist that scattered them as they went; and at once the black smoke thickened from the chimney and went spiralling into the limpid sky. The roaring of the fire cut off sharply as the firebox door was shut, and then the pounding of the engines was heard again, and the hiss of steam and the chuffing of exhausts.

'Not bad, is it?' said Sam, and he was looking almost proudly towards the engine-house. 'Mind you, we're going to have 'em bigger than that before we've done.'

'What's wrong with 'em?' The tenter rounded on him suddenly. 'There's two engines in there, and it's ten horses in each of 'em. Isn't twenty horses enough?'

'We could do wi' thirty.'

The door from the engine-room burst suddenly open, and a man came out who was plainly in a hurry. He made straight for Sam.

'I've been chasing you all round t'mill. There's one o' them throstles howling like a sick cat.'

'Hasn't anybody done anything?'

'Bill o' Ned's had a go at it, and he's made it a dam' sight worse.'

'All right. Tell 'em I'll come.'

There was a quick word with the tenter and a nod to Jack o' Dick's, and then they went through to the main building again. Sam made straight for the stair, and Robert for the counting house, and in the doorway he stopped short. Nicholas England, who had been said to be in Blackburn, was standing by the table in talk with Bradley, and for once he had no look of amusement.

'Oh, here you are!' He spoke tersely. 'Did you see any trouble?'

'There's a throstle that's making---'

'I meant men, not machines.'

'I saw no trouble.'

'I saw plenty. I was going to Blackburn, and I was waiting outside my house while they brought my horse round. Then the row started, and it was like a couple of hustings with a cock fight thrown in. You know some of the putters-out have places down those side-streets?'

'I've heard of it.'

'It's the small men—Halstead and Lonsdale and that lot. So I walked down to have a look, and the street was just about solid with men. Two or three hundred of 'em, outside Halstead's place, and I think he'd been trying to put out work at ninepence. They were telling him what he could do with it, and Halstead didn't like it much.'

'I don't suppose he did,' said Bradley. 'But what came next?' 'That's street's badly paved.'

'What's that to do with it?'

'A lot of loose stones. So when they'd nothing else to do they started chucking 'em at Halstead's windows. Surprising what a noise glass can make.'

'Yes, but---'

'So I had to do some persuading, and just when I had 'em quiet, there was a hell of a noise from the next street. Of course it was another lot, doing the same thing, and as soon as my beauties heard it they thought they'd go and help. So off they went, up into Market Street, and that's where they met the second lot. So now we had about five hundred of 'em, all with nothing to do.' He drawled it, and the familiar quiver of his eyebrows hinted at amusement once again. 'So they took it into their heads to go down Spring Lane for a chat with Podgy Thornber. They were wondering if he could swim.'

'Swim?'

'Well, he has a pond down there to feed his boilers, and they were wondering——'

'Hell!'

'Oh, I don't know.' There was no doubt now about the eyebrows. 'I haven't actually seen Podgy in a pond, but I'm pretty sure he'd float. The only thing I wasn't sure of was which way up he'd float. It might be belly up, or——'

'Please! What did you do?'

'I happened to see Bill Wood. He must have been up early for once.'

'The Justice?'

'Yes. Of course he's a damned old woman, but I suppose he does his best. Only I wish he wouldn't think that these lads of ours are a crew of Jacobins, all howling for blood and loot.'

'They're certainly howling for trouble.'

'But not that sort of trouble.' His voice came incisively now, and the lean face had hardened. 'They don't give a damn who governs the country, and they wouldn't know what a Jacobin is. They don't even want to know. All they want is a wage they can keep their families on, and there's no more to it than that—yet.'

'You sound half on their side.'

'Well, why shouldn't I be? I'm not a landed gentleman, or a Justice either. I'm just a man who's made his way up, and learnt a bit in doing it.' He paused, and the brooding look was in his eyes again, as it had been when he gave the money in

the churchyard. 'I've been nineteen years in this town now, and
I've found 'em a good crowd. They're tough and they're rough.
They're pretty foul-mouthed, and they can be as pig-headed as you like, but if you treat 'em as human beings they'll treat you the same. And in their own queer way they can sum a man up to a split hair.'

'But would you tell us what happened this morning? You

say you met Mr. Wood?'

'I did, and that fool of a constable was with him, old Asquith. So he came too. At least, he trotted behind, and off we went.' There was a short laugh, and the gleam of mischief was in his eyes again. 'You should have seen us. There was me in my boots, spurs and all. Asquith had his white stick, and Wood had a bit of paper with the Riot Act on it. So off we went in search of Podgy, and a fine lot we were to keep the King's Peace. Are you fond of music?'

'Now, please! What has that to--'

'I just wondered. Because the next thing was the band.'

'What band?'

'Haven't you seen 'em on Saturdays, up on Colne Field? You can have 'em for weddings, if you want to.'

'The Old Town Band?'

'Is that what they're called? Well, anyway, there they were.'

'Where?'

'In the churchyard, of course.'

'But, please!' Bradley was sounding desperate now. 'At half-past seven in the morning? Playing in the churchyard?'

'I didn't say they were playing. They were just tooting a bit, and spitting between toots. You know—when they're getting ready?'

'But getting ready for what?'

'I wondered that myself, so I let Wood go on while I had a word with the band. Of course they're weavers really, who want to earn a bit more, and it soon came out that they'd no work left as weavers, and they were for playing in the street for what folks would give 'em. So I hired 'em.'

He paused, evidently relishing his tale, and he waited happily while his listeners looked blankly at each other. Then his sardonic voice went on.

'I took 'em to the Derby Arms first, and wet 'em a bit. Two minutes, and they'd still the froth on their teeth when we came out. Then off we went, down Spring Lane. Me first, spurs and all. Then the band, and I told 'em to blow like hell. They did too. They blew all the froth back, and most of it came on my neck, but you couldn't say folks didn't hear us. They all heard us.'

'The mob, you mean?'

'Of course. They were down in the valley there, at Vivary Bridge, and I think all Podgy's spinners had come out to join 'em. Of course he's still running as a spinner, though he's stopped on the weaving side.'

'But the Justice?'

'Oh, he was standing on a wall, trying to read from his bit of paper. I didn't see anyone listening.'

'What were they doing?'

'Shouting a bit, and chucking stones at windows.'

'And Podg--- Mr. Thornber?'

'Standing in a window with a shotgun. I'll say it for Podgy, he was full of fight, though it was pretty silly of him. If he'd let fly with that gun, they might have killed him. Mind you, if he'd shot the trombone, I think they'd have forgiven him. I would, anyway.'

'But what did you do?'

'What anyone else would ha' done. We came down to the bridge, and I led the way up-stream. Of course the whole mob turned to look, and then they started cheering. So I shouted "Down with the Corn Laws!", and that set 'em off. Of course they don't know what Corn Laws are, but they cheered. Then I shouted "Come on, lads, all wi' t'band!", and I didn't need to tell 'em twice.'

'Good God!' said Bradley, and there was almost wonder in his tone. 'But where to?'

'Don't ask me. I hadn't told the band where to take 'em to.' 'Good God!' said Bradley again. 'What a scheme!'

'Easy, once I found the band. Men are easy, when they don't know what they want. But it's all right now, though I do think Podgy might have thanked me. He'd lost his spinners, though. They'd gone with the band, and he was quite upset about it.'

'But didn't he say anything?'

'Nothing I liked, so I came back here.' The tone changed suddenly. 'You say it's all quiet?'

'All as usual.'

'You never quite know, once trouble starts. It can break out anywhere, and it's about time Podgy and his friends thought

again. It doesn't help to set men starving, and I want you to tell him so from me.' He swung suddenly to Robert, and he was speaking crisply as he took his hat from the table. 'I'm off to Blackburn now, and while I'm there you can go to Vivary Bridge for me and have a word with Thornber. Ask him when he's going to give his lads some work again. Tell him we'll all be safer when he does. Tell him from me, you understand.'

'Very well.'

'It can wait till you've had your dinner, and he may be a bit cooler by then. But I want you to find out what he's up to. Watch things for me here, Dick.'

He flung that at Bradley, and with no more ado he was out of the room. They heard the ring of his boots in the corridor; and then, through the open window, they saw him mount his horse and go trotting away down the wagon road by the river. He seemed quite unhurried.

'What a man!' said Bradley slowly. 'Do you wonder they call him Old Nick? He'd outwit the Devil, and then make a joke of it. Do you notice he's given you a job?'

'Finding what Thornber's up to?'

'Yes. And for all his queer ways, you'd better have the answer. He'll expect it.'

7

DEADLOCK

Spring Lane, in that afternoon of early summer, looked aptly named. It ran steeply down from the main street to the adjacent valley, and only at the top were there a few houses. Its lower part went curving between banks gay with flowers; and, because it was too steep for wagons to climb, it had never been paved. It was a track of grass and sun-baked mud, rural

Indeed; and Robert, striding down it with the sun hot on his back, found himself thinking of a tale that there had once been a fishpond here. It seemed quiet and remote enough.

He came round the bend, and below him was a patch of swampy mud, all that was left of the ancient vivary. The lane was coming into a long valley that flanked the main ridge, and the stream ran down the valley, thin and muddy in these days of heat. A bridge spanned the stream, to carry the lane across. and near the bridge lay a newer pond, though it was not of the size that could feed a water-wheel. This trickling stream was not a weight for that, and old Thomas Thornber had shown some courage when he built this mill at Vivary Bridge. There was water enough only for boilers, and his mill depended on them. He had nothing but steam to turn his spindles, and there had been no lack of folk to prophesy disaster when he trusted his fortunes to nothing more than vapour. But Thornber had known what he was doing. He was a shrewd tough Yorkshireman from a village called Barnoldswick, which was said to be the Devil's own, and when his engines kept on turning they said he had the Devil's luck. There had been breakdowns indeed, more of them than he cared for at first, but little by little, as his engine-tenters learned their trade, his machines had kept on turning, his boilers boiling, and his chimney smoking. It was smoking at this moment, as Robert came down the hill.

That, however, was all. There was a thread of smoke from the chimney, but no puffs of steam from the engines, no signs of work and bustle. All was quiet, and in place of the thump of engines and the squeal of shafting there was a rustic peace, proper to the sunlit afternoon. The mill looked deserted, the doors barred and the shutters over the windows, and only the visitor's footfalls broke the silence. There seemed not a soul in sight, and for a moment he wondered how he could fulfil his mission. It was evident that the spinners had not returned after being lured away this morning.

He hammered the great iron knocker on the door, and no one answered, nor was there any sound of a footfall within. For a full minute he stood waiting in the sunlight, and then he turned from the door with a notion of trying the back; and as he rounded the end of the mill there was a shout behind him, hard and aggressive.

'What d'ya want?'

He swung round instantly, and he was facing the house that flanked the mill. It was the owner's house, as square and strong as the one at Greenfield, and one of the windows had been opened. Tom Thornber was leaning out, a shotgun in his hand.

'What d'ya want?' he called again. 'Who the hell are you?'

'You were talking to me yesterday.'

His tone seemed to have an effect. Thornber stared at him with some sort of recognition, and then he lowered the gun.

'After church, wasn't it? Shaw?' Again the hard stare came. 'Well, what do you want?'

'I'm from Mr. England.'

'Then you can take his wife home.'

'I've come here to---'

'I'll let you in. The door's round there.'

He jerked his thumb to the corner of the house, and in the same instant he withdrew his head and pulled the window down. It shut noisily, and there was a glimpse of his back as he turned away. Then, as Robert walked round the corner, there was the slide of a bolt, and the heavy front door was pulled open. He went in, and at once Thornber bolted the door behind him. He was as ungracious as ever, but he led into what was no doubt the parlour, a room away from the sun, pleasantly cool and dim. Two women were sitting by the opened window, and they turned as the men walked in.

'His name's Shaw,' said Thornber curtly. 'Nick sent him.'

'Oh?' The elder of the women rose to her feet to face him. 'I've heard my husband speak of you, Mr. Shaw. I'm Ellen England.'

He did his best at a bow while he remembered that she was Thornber's sister, and already he was seeing it plainly in her face. It was the same round face, thick in the lips and slow in the eyes, softer and better-natured here, but surely the same. She seemed to inspect him carefully, and then she spoke again.

'I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Shaw. This is my sister, Miss Thornber.'

He turned quickly to the younger woman, and he saw that this was the family face once more. She would be in her late thirties, a year or two younger than Ellen, but she looked the more tired of the two, and with this uncouth brother to look after, and an aged father, she had perhaps an excuse for that.

'Well, what have you come for?'

'The brother's voice broke in suddenly, loud and aggressive,

and Robert turned almost with relief. He did not much like the man, but he did know how to answer this sort of talk. He had had some practice at it in Trawden.

'I've told you I'm from Mr. England. He wants to know when you're going to put work out to your weavers again.'

'How the hell should I know? When do I get my spinners back?'

'Tomorrow, I should think. We'll all be safer when your weavers have some work to do.'

'I'm not putting-out again till they've learned their manners. That's why we stopped 'em.' Thornber's jaw was set in plain truculence now. 'You can tell Nick England that there are still masters and men in the world—whatever he thinks he is—and we're the masters. And if these damned good-for-nothings want work again they can come and ask for it. They won't be so long about it, either. They'll sit up and beg before the week's out.'

'They didn't look like it this morning.'

'Do you think we're scared of 'em?' His voice had taken a deeper note now, and the ring of obstinacy in it was not to be mistaken. 'We don't like being stopped for work any more than other men do. We're losing our money, and we're not in trade for that. But right's right, and we're not going to be kicked along by our own men. We'll start 'em again when we've a reason for doing it, and not before. And you can tell Nick England that.'

Robert stood stiffly, understanding now that the man meant it and that there was nothing to be gained by argument. There was something to be reported to Nicholas; but further argument would only make Tom Thornber worse.

'Very well. I'll tell Mr. England what you say.'

'You can take Ellen home as you go. I don't know what she came here at all for. She'd have had more sense if she'd stayed at home.'

Ellen England was on her feet at once, looking indignant but plainly ready to go, and her farewells were brief and quick. The door slammed heavily behind them as Tom saw them out, and then they were walking up the hill together, slowly in the heat. She chattered unceasingly as they went, and he found himself wondering if she was as wordy with her husband.

'Tom is so difficult,' was the theme she began on. 'Why

shouldn't I go for a talk with Ann if I wish to?'

'Your sister?'

'Now who else should it be? She's the only one of us not married, and of course there has to be one at home to look after Father, but she says he's so difficult—Tom, I mean, not Father, though he's bad enough—and she says she'll be wed herself if it goes on, and then where should we be? Ann should know her duty better.' She halted in her walk, looking down on the mill below, and the house that had been her home. 'Why shouldn't I go down to Ann if I wish to? What does Tom think will happen to me?'

'I expect he was thinking of the mob down there this morn-

ing.'

'Well, they won't harm me, will they. They know who my husband is.'

It was in his mind that they might have known who her brother was, but she did not seem to think of that. She went babbling on as she began her walk again.

'It's time Tom was married. That's what's wrong with him. If he had a wife he'd have more to think about, and we did hope something might come of it last week, but it didn't.'

'But what was that, pray?'

'Oh, Nicholas had a sister here while I was away. That's Anna. She's like Nicholas, and she always thinks she knows best, but Tom seemed interested in her. I don't understand why, but that's what they tell me.'

'Oh?' He had a sudden memory of the churchyard, and Tom

in talk with Anna.

'Well, that's what I'm told, and I don't understand why she hasn't tried to make more of it with him. It would be a very good match for her, wouldn't it, at Vivary Bridge? Quite a rise in the world for her, and she isn't as young as she used to be.'

'Possibly.' He answered her without much warmth. 'But

you'll be pleased, of course, that she didn't.'

'Well, yes.' She seemed to ruminate on it for a moment. 'Though Tom really does need somebody to look after him.'

'But surely your sister--'

'Oh, she's no use. She does her best, but she lets Tom have all his own way. Besides, as I was telling you, she's being difficult. Anna's twenty-six, and Tom's twenty-seven. Very suitable, isn't it?'

'In that respect.' He answered in something like alarm, as he suddenly wondered what this matchmaking woman was really capable of. There was a persistence about her which he was

beginning to dislike, and he set himself hurriedly to give a damping answer. 'However, since you say that she doesn't show

any sign of----'

He stopped short; and he was heard to declare, in later years, that the Serpent had entered into him at that moment. As an Inghamite he was supposed to be unreceptive to Serpents, but here was one that could not be ignored. Its sly temptation was of the sharpest.

'I think there's a lot in what you say, Mrs. England.' To his own surprise he was speaking almost blandly now, and his tone was very calm and persuasive. 'Of course she was very busy when she was here, looking after the children and so on. Probably she had no chance to notice anyone. If she were less busy she might—er—consider her affairs. I'm sure it's worth trying.'

'What is worth trying?'

'Well, don't you think that if she were to be invited here again—not in charge of children, you understand, but with leisure to look around her—don't you think she might then see where her interest is?'

'But she's somewhere in Yorkshire.'

'Bingley, I'm told. So she won't see any more of Mr. Thornber unless she's invited to come back.'

'Ah!' She nodded sagely now. 'Just to see Nicholas, you mean? That would be the way to fetch her. I'll think it over.'

'Do.

'Isn't Anna different from her sister? Do you know Susan Phillips?'

'Certainly I do. I used to work at Greenfield.'

'Wasn't that a shocking accident there on Saturday?'

'But I haven't heard of anything.'

'There was a man killed-killed by the wheel.'

'Oh?' His tone had changed quickly 'I'm sorry. Do you know what happened?'

'Not really. Only that they found him dead, between the wall

and the wheel.'

'I'm sorry. Phillips will be sorry too. I must walk out to Greenfield and have a word with him.'

'If you could say anything to take Susan's mind off this—'
'I'll try. You—er—you'll remember the other matter, won't

you?'

They came to Cumberland House, where the light was golden

on the cream-coloured stone, and the curtains were drawn against the afternoon sun. He parted from her cordially, and five minutes later, at St. Helen's mill, he had to come to earth again. Nicholas was in the counting house, newly returned from Blackburn, hot and dusty, and looking more than ever in need of his brandy-and-water; but he turned alertly, and whatever he had been saying was put aside as he asked what Thornber meant to do.

'Nothing.' The answer came promptly, and in terms as terse as his own. 'He'd like to put out work again, but it would look like giving in, so he won't do it. Not unless he can find an excuse.'

'Can you think of one for him?'

'No.'

'I can't, either.'

'I suppose it's his own affair.'

'Unless he provokes something worse, and then it might be anybody's affair. That's why he's so dam' dangerous.' For a moment the lean face was almost haggard as Nicholas stood in brooding thought. 'I suppose we'll just have to hope an excuse turns up for him, but I can't think what it's going to be. Now then—' He swung suddenly on Bradley, and his tone had changed abruptly. 'Have you worked the cost accounts for last week?'

'Not yet. This is only Monday.'

'I know that, but I want 'em. I've been talking to Lister and Pilkington over in Blackburn, and they'll take quite a lot of yarn from us if we can get the price right. It's a question of being below their own spinners.'

'After paying for sending it?'

'That's just it. But our throstles are newer, and we can buy better than the Blackburn men, so we might just do it. We'll have to, if Thornber and his friends are stopping the market for us here. Now what Blackburn wants is eighties.'

'We were spinning eighties all last week.'

'I'm glad you know it. But I want those costs at once.'

'I'll do my best.'

'You'll have to do a little better than that. Start at once. Get something into shape tonight, and go on with it tomorrow. You can have Shaw to help you, and his own work can wait. We'll have to be down to about five and a half shillings a

spindle, and I want to know what profit it will leave us. Now

I'm going up for tea. I may come in later.'

He went briskly away, very much the master of affairs, and thereafter he held them to it. They were at work that evening until the last of the light had gone, and they were at it again at seven o'clock next morning. It was drawing towards the end of Tuesday before he declared with a sigh of relief that he would be able to strike his bargain at Blackburn. But even then he had not finished. He demanded further calculations, that he might know at what price he could offer finer twists, and neither of his clerks was sorry when he at last took horse on the Wednesday morning with all the needed papers in his pockets. He would be in Blackburn all day, he said; and then, with a quick smile on his face, he added that they had both done well for him, and might take the afternoon out of the mill if they chose to.

'What a man!' said Bradley, and not for the first time, as he stared out of the window at the retreating rider. 'He keeps everybody up to the collar. If you lie back just a little he knows it, and you soon know that he knows it. But if you really do your best he knows that too, and it's more than you can say

for some men, these days.'

'How does he treat the spinners?'

'Much like us. Of course they think he's mad, but they don't mind that. He does treat them as human beings. Did you know they held a meeting yesterday, in their dinner hour?'

'What sort of meeting?'

'Sympathy with the weavers. Resolutions about supporting them. Then they passed a hat round, and I fancy some of our lads will be off beer for the rest of the week. They pretty well gave what they had.'

'But why this support for the weavers? That's a different

trade. It doesn't touch our men, does it?'

'No.' For a moment Bradley seemed engrossed in a wagon piled with coals that was bumping its way to the mill. 'But there are some new notions about in these days. They seem to think that in some sense they're all brothers—all who work in factories, I mean. It cuts across trades, so you have spinners feeling for weavers. It's fairly new.'

'Did it come with machines?'

'I think with factories more than machines. I suppose in the old days, with spinning and weaving done at home, it must have

been different. But now they're all in a factory together, and they have this feeling of having to help each other. But we seem to have an afternoon off. What do you think of doing?'

It was an abrupt change, clearly signifying that he had had enough of this talk, and Robert promptly accepted it.

'I'll probably walk out to Greenfield,' he said. 'I heard they've had an accident there, and I'd like a word with Phillips.'

'You won't be late back, I hope? The town mightn't be very safe after dark.'

'Do you think that's really true?'

'It might be, if Thornber looses off with a shotgun. Between him and the others I should say that just about anything can happen.'

8

THE STRANGE EXCUSE

THERE was music in the street, which was something not heard often in the working day. Robert heard it as he set off after dinner on his way to Greenfield, and for a moment he disbelieved it. Somewhere down the street a band was playing, a crude and noisy band, thumping at a marching tune, and at once he remembered the tale of yesterday. The band that Nicholas had so opportunely found had been of out-of-work weavers ready to play in the street for what they could get, and no doubt they were trying it again today. It sounded like that sort of band, and already he was feeling in his pockets for a copper to give to them. Then he noticed that there was a movement of people in the street, some hurrying to meet the band, and some turning away into side-streets. There were faces at upper windows, and some of the shops were putting up the shutters. There might be a little more to this than he had

thought, and his long stride quickened as he went past the church.

Then he could see it all. The band was scarcely a hundred yards away, blaring and thumping in the centre of the street; and behind it, marching in steady order, was a solid river of men. They were pouring out of Spring Lane in the farther distance, and then turning up the main street, rank upon rank, in their places behind the band. Banners were uplifted in the ranks, and men were busy with collecting boxes. A host of scampering children was happily following the band, and farther back, nearer the tail of the procession, men were walking steadily at its sides; well-wishers, perhaps, who had not been asked to join, but were sympathetically walking with it.

He kept to his stride, very keen and observant now, and soon he could read the swaying banners. Work, not Bread, said the first. What is a Weaver's Wage? asked another. What will the Poor Rate be when All are Paupers? said a third. Machines break Men: Who'll break Them? was the burden of the fourth; and while he was considering it he became aware that someone else was considering it too. To his left, by the door of the Methodist Chapel, two men were standing, and in one of them he recognized the tall spare figure of William Wood, the senior of the town's two Justices. He was standing discreetly back from the street, and he was watching this display with a very stony countenance.

The noise of the band was receding now, and the end of the procession was in sight, followed by the expected clutter of hangers-on. Robert kept to his stride, disturbed by what this might portend. There would be six hundred men at least in this array, and at the moment they were well behaved, but some of them had sullen faces, and many had heavy sticks which they trailed as they walked, or sloped on their shoulders. Then another detail took his eye. He was at the tail of the procession now, where the men who seemed well-wishers were walking at the side, and some of them were from the corn mill at Greenfield, men he had paid there, week by week. It was an easy guess that the mill had stopped again for want of water, and that the corn men were now showing their sympathy with the weavers.

He turned down Spring Lane. It was not his best route to Greenfield, but the procession had come from down there, and he knew what they thought of Thornber. Yet the lane seemed peaceful enough as he went down with the hot sun on his back, exactly as he had done yesterday. All sound of the procession faded, and it was so quiet that when he came to the bottom he could hear the ripple of water in the stream and the sigh of wind in the grass. The mill seemed deserted, as silent as the rest, with the shutters up and the doors barred, again as it had been yesterday, and for a moment he halted by the bridge to look more carefully. Then he saw that in a wide swath round the mill the grass was trodden flat, as if by countless feet. He looked at it grimly, guessing that the whole procession had been marching round and round in a threatening demonstration; and he wondered what the response had been.

In the house a shutter was pushed suddenly open with a creak of hinges, and as he whipped round he saw Tom Thornber at the window again. Recognition this time was mutual, and it was Thornber who spoke first.

'What d'you want now?'

'I want to know if you're safe.'

'Only just. They've taken my damn spinners with 'em.'

'What happened?'

'They came marching here, of course, like the soldiers we haven't got, all the out-at-elbow Jack-o'-looms of Colne, blast 'em!' He sounded vicious now. 'Bawling at the spinners to get out and join 'em. When the hell do we get soldiers?'

'I don't know. What did the spinners do?'

'They started slipping out.'

'Have they all gone?'

- 'Every Jack of 'em. Even the tenters.' His voice was cracking with anger now. 'Every bastard of 'em's gone. I've had to draw the fires myself, and put the shutters up, and what sort of a job's that for the master?'

'It isn't. But is it all quiet now?'

'Can't you see it is?'

'Well, I'm glad it's no worse. They looked dangerous to me. Don't you think you'd better put out work again?'

'Belly-crawling to 'em? Is that all you've come to say?'

'I suppose so.'

'Then go to hell. Where are you going to?'

'Greenfield.'

'Don't wake Phillips. I hope he's some men left.'

'He hasn't. They were following your lot up the street. I expect he's stopped for water.'

'I don't give a damn what he's stopped for. Have you any more to say?'

'No.'

'I haven't either.'

He withdrew abruptly. The window was pushed up and Robert was left alone in the sunlight, to make the best of it. He stood for a moment in surprise, and then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he walked away down the stream which would bring him to the wagon-road to Greenfield. He was thinking again of the banners and heavy sticks, of the men from Greenfield who had shown their sympathy by following, and of Thornber's spinners who had walked away from their work and wages at the call. This feeling that Bradley had spoken about, of a feeling between trades, now seemed a disturbing reality, and he was not at all surprised that Mr. Wood, the magistrate, had viewed the procession icily.

The corn mill was stopped, and by the pool was John Phillips himself. He turned when he saw who was coming, and

he gave friendly greeting.

'No work for you today?' he asked.

'I've an hour or two off. But how is it here?'
'Not much water and not much trade. They balance excellently.' The quiet smile was with Phillips for a moment, and then it faded. 'But did you know we'd had some trouble?

Have you heard about Laycock, the fettler?'

'I'm afraid I have. What happened?'

'We don't know. We just found him dead, between the wall and the wheel. It was Saturday morning, and I expect he meant to grease the wheel. One of the shafts must have hit him, and down he went. He'd perhaps done it too often, and wheels can be wicked things.'

'That's what Anna said.'

'Susan's sister?'

'Yes.'

'I don't know why she was talking about wheels, but she was quite right. Wicked is the word. But it's time for tea. That means you as well. Come along.'

'Well, if I'm not---'

'Don't be silly. Besides, it will be good for Susan to have you to talk to. She gets too much of me. You know she's expecting her fourth?'

'Well, yes.'

'In about eight weeks, we hope, and how I'm going to arrange it, I don't know. She's not at her best, after this Laycock affair, so somebody pretty competent will have to take charge of the house. Casual help won't do.'

'Of course not.' Robert spoke quite calmly, and only the merest hiss had been needed from the Serpent this time. 'Isn't

it work that Anna England mostly does?'

'I don't think I know what Anna does.'

'She does exactly that. It's why she was here the other week. She was looking after the children while Mrs. England was away. I'm told she's doing the same thing now at Bingley for another brother. It seems to be her regular work.'

'I wish Susan had told me.' The answer was short, and for a moment he seemed to stand in thought. 'Well, thank you. It sounds excellent, if it would work. But Anna can be pretty difficult. It's about three years since she was last here, and I fancy Susan tried to tell her how some of her ways look to other people. Susan's her elder sister, after all.'

'Well, yes. But---'

'Exactly. And they haven't met since. I'll have a word with Susan, but I doubt if those two change their minds much.' He seemed to dismiss the matter, and then, as they came to the door of the house, his tone was suddenly brisk. 'Give us what news you can. It may take Susan's mind off things.'

Robert did his best at it, and he gave first place to the tale of Nicholas at Vivary Bridge, and his hiring of the band to divert the mob. Nicholas was Susan's brother, and he thought she would be pleased at this. He quickly found that she was not.

'Nicholas,' she remarked acidly, 'seems to have no sense of what is fitting. Will he never grow up?'

'But I don't quite--'

'He'll be forty-two in October, and would anybody think it?'

Which meant that Susan was not Anna, who would surely have heard the tale with a laugh. The heavier Susan saw it differently. Nor did her husband find it funny. He seized instead on the hard facts of the mob and the threat to the future, and soon he was putting questions. They had to be answered, and there was nothing for it but to tell him of this afternoon's procession, and of his own men walking in support of it.

'I'm not much surprised,' he said carefully. 'But it's serious

-more serious than Thornber thinks. Or does Thornber think?'

'Probably he doesn't. Of course there have been combinations of workmen in these last few years, and I suppose they did give the men this notion of holding together. But what I don't understand is men in different trades, like your corn men walking with the weavers.'

'Have you thought about the new Poor Law? I fancy people

are coming to understand what it will mean.'

'I don't see the point.'

'The point is that there are to be no more weekly shillings. If a man needs relief, he must now go to the workhouse, and so must his family. A man isn't to ask for relief unless he really must, and that's why these corn men of mine walk with the weavers. It's the same workhouse for both of them. It puts all labouring men together, and perhaps it's made them feel that they are together. At least, that's my guess.'

'I think it's a good guess.' Robert spoke slowly, and he was surprised, as he had been surprised before, at the insight of this slow and thoughtful man. But Phillips, he remembered, was not in a manufacturer's hurry. He took time in life to think on

things.

Then Susan sounded impatient.

'Must you talk like this at tea?' she asked. 'We were hearing of Tom Thornber's troubles, and these men at his mill. You don't think he's in any danger, do you?'

'I think he'd be safer if he were a little more sensible. That's

to say, if he were somebody else.'

'John, what do you mean?'

'My dear, you know Tom as well as I do. He's been in upsets of one sort or another for years past, and always for the same reason. He can never see anything from any point of view but his own.'

'Are you saying he ought to give way to these men?'

'I think he ought to give them some work to do. I dare say he has found them troublesome, but starving them isn't a good way of making them less so.'

'You aren't taking these men's side against their master,

are you?'

'Of course I'm not. But when there's one master and a hundred men, a little tact can be useful, and Tom hasn't any. That's all. What do you think of it, Shaw?'

'He'd be wise to come to terms.'

'But you think he won't?'

'He'd like to, but he won't. He'd do it if he could have a pretext, but he can't think of one.'

'Can Nick England?'

'He says he can't.'

'Perhaps he will, though.' He turned, half smiling, to his wife. 'I've a lot of faith in that brother of yours. I know his sense of humour can be odd, but he does think of things. He'll

probably think of a pretext.'

But he did not. The pretext came surprisingly and strangely, but it did not come from Nicholas or anybody else. It came from the outer world. There was no more talk about it at tea, Phillips turning quickly to lighter things and holding to them when the meal ended, and it was nearing seven o'clock when Robert took leave to go. It was the twenty-first of June, the longest day of the year, and there were still two good hours of daylight left as he went unhurriedly up the street. Then he became aware that the town was busier and noisier than he would have expected. The taverns and beerhouses all seemed thronged, and there were men in the street too. All of them were talking, and through the tavern windows he could see groups of men again, also in busy talk. Plainly something had happened. Some event had called men out and made their voices busy, and it might concern Tom Thornber.

A month ago he might have wondered how to learn. He might even have stopped someone in the street to ask. But now he knew better, and he made unhesitatingly for the Hole i' th' Wall. That was the place for news. If Joe Hoyle should be there, so much the better; but there would certainly be some-

one who would tell him.

He had almost to push his way in, so crowded was the place, and after the summer light the room seemed low and dim, with a haze of tobacco smoke below the rafters. Then, over by a window, he caught sight of men he knew: Joe Hoyle, Barnard Crook and Nicholas England. They were in a little group round a table, with a big dark-haired man he was sure he had seen before; and just beyond them, leaning against the wall with a beer mug in his hand, was Tom Thornber himself. For a moment Robert stood watching, asking himself who the darkhaired man might be, and then he pushed his way confidently towards them, knowing by now that the proper manners here were the free-and-easy, and that anyone might talk with

anyone if he did it with a casual air. Barnard Crook saw him first, and waved a greeting. Then, as he came close, Nicholas was looking up with an arching eyebrow.

"Evening, Shaw. Hope you're drinking better than you were

the other night. What'll you have?'

'Beer, if I may.'

'Just as you like.' He waved to the landlord. 'Beer. Brandy for me. Mr. Holroyd too. Crook, what's yours?'

Someone pushed an empty stool across, and Robert found the quick pause useful while he sorted this out. The dark-haired man was evidently Holroyd, and that was identification enough. Harry Holroyd, with a factory half way down the slope of Waterside, was the only spinner in the town to rival Nicholas England. But he was a putter-out too, which gave him, all in all, the bigger business. Thornber probably came third, and with the three of them present this was an influential group, to which Joe Hoyle had characteristically attached himself. There was also Barnard Crook, who counted for more than lesser men supposed.

'You're looking hot,' said Joe. 'Have you come far?'

'I've walked back from Greenfield. But what's wrong in the town?'

'Haven't you heard about it? How do we tell him?'

He seemed to be appealing to the others, and Crook, who had refused another drink and was still toying with most of an earlier one, looked across soberly enough.

'There's not much to tell you, Shaw. The King's dead.'

It took him a moment to understand. The King was not a personage known in Colne. He existed, no doubt, but he was not in anybody's thoughts.

'King William?' he said slowly, still not sure of it.

'That's right,' said Tom Thornber, from against the wall. 'Our old Billy.'

'I'm sorry.' He had a vague idea that he ought to say it, but his thoughts were already reaching forward. 'When did it happen?'

Yesterday.' Nicholas gave him the answer now. 'Yesterday, and they knew it in Blackburn this morning. That's what comes of having a railway. It brought the news north in one night.'

'But who'll be King now?'

'No one will.' Holroyd lifted a flushed face and spoke with

the care of a man who can feel one drink too many. 'It's a woman. Al—— how does it go?'

'Alexandrina Victoria,' said Crook clearly. 'I've told you twice already. She was eighteen last month.'

'Then what does she know about being Queen?'

'About as much as you do.'

'Shut up,' said Tom Thornber suddenly. 'It gives us what

we want, and that's the thing.'

'I've told you it does.' Holroyd roused himself with the air of a man who has said a good thing twice and means to say it again. 'It's what I said to Wood when he told me about Billy. Never mind, I said, he's dead and gone and we can't fetch him back. But here's a Queen, I said, young and lovely.'

'How the hell do you know?'

'I don't. But it's good enough to tell Jack Weaver.'

'But how do we put it?'

'Just as I've said. Here's a Queen, we say, young and lovely, and we can't break her blasted heart with troubles like this, can we? So back you get to work, and we'll all put it out to you like we used to do. It's thirteen pence the piece, and all to please the Queen. How's that?'

'Fine,' said Thornber. 'It ought to get 'em back, and we shan't have given in to 'em. shall we?'

'They might take it,' said Crook.

'Let's hope they do.' Nicholas spoke quietly and his eyes were moving from the contented Holroyd to the beaming Thornber. 'If it works we'll thank Harry. If it doesn't we may have to bury him. Now then——' He lifted his glass decisively. 'God save the Oueen!'

'Oh, aye.' Holroyd pulled himself upright, and then a shade of doubt showed suddenly in his heated face. 'What's her dam' name?'

'Alexandrina Victoria,' said Crook carefully.

STORM AND STRESS

A FILM of cloud, hanging in the eastern sky, gave hint next morning of a change of weather; and no sooner had Robert stepped briskly into the street, for his early walk to the mill, than he became aware that something was afoot. The streets were thronged, and only a few were walking as if they had work to go to. Most of them were standing in groups, or moving aimlessly, but their faces were hard and sullen. Most of them carried sticks, and their muttered talk had a way of stopping while he went past; and he knew it was because he was better dressed than they and had a look of affairs about him. He was not one of them, and that was enough to keep them quiet.

He went thoughtfully down Colne Lane, and for the moment all seemed normal at St. Helen's mill. The smoke from the chimney seemed darker against the clouded sky, and the wisps of steam were whiter; but in the throng of workers clattering down in their clogs there was nothing to note, and there were not many laggards when the howl of the whistle rent the air promptly at seven o'clock. The engines puffed themselves into motion with the same promptness, and in the counting house Dick Bradley was already hanging his coat on the peg and

taking his working jacket.

'Looks like a change of weather.'

'Yes.' Robert had to lift his voice now above the rumble of the shafting. 'Are we going to have trouble in the town?'

'I'm not sure. Some of the masters have been paying ninepence you know, and the men aren't in a mood for any more

of it. But we shall soon hear what's happening.'

They heard it from Nicholas, who came in late that Thursday morning. It was past eight when he came, and from the set of his face they could see that there was news. Bradley spoke shortly.

'What is it?' he asked.

'Same as Monday.' The answer was equally short. 'That's to say the masters are offering work again and the men won't have it.'

'Why not?'

'Wages—as on Monday. The employers are saying thirteen pence again, and the men won't have it. They're shouting for fifteen now.'

'Hell!' said Bradley.

'A good word. You can nearly smell the smoke up there.' He laughed softly. 'I pushed my way to Holroyd's place, and he hadn't expected it. He thought when he offered 'em thirteen again, they'd throw their hats up and all shout "God bless Harry!" Well, they didn't.'

'What did he say to that?'

'He's past saying anything.'

'Then what did you say?'

'I said if he hadn't found out yet that weavers are a dam' queer lot, it's time he learnt. He is doing, too. I wonder how Podgy's getting on.'

'Yes.' Robert spoke quietly, and with a quick thought of Thornber at a window with a shot-gun. 'I hope he's not doing something silly.'

'Why hope that, with Podgy? I thought my wife would be worried about him, but she only has one idea at a time, and this morning it isn't Podgy.' Again his short laugh came. 'She's been collecting twopences all the week, pestering everyone she can think of. Oatmeal for starving weavers. She and the curate were going to stand in the church porch this morning, spooning the stuff out, and now it looks as if she isn't.' He swung suddenly round on Bradley. 'But how are we here? All the hands working?'

'We haven't called a roll, but I don't know of anyone missing.'

'Let's hope it stays like that. They had Podgy's spinners out the other day, and they might have ours. There's no saying. Now I want some more cost figures, and I want them now. It's no good spinning if we can't sell.'

He turned to the details at once, and for the next two hours he was wholly absorbed in the costs of yarn. He kept his helpers as busy as himself, and all thought of what might be happening in the town had gone from their minds when there was a brusque tap on the door. Sam Hartley, the fettler, pushed his tousled head into the room.

'There's Amos asking what he's to do,' he said abruptly, and

Nicholas came out of the figures as smoothly as he had gone into them.'

'About what, Sam?'

'He calls it a waste o' coals, and he's right.'

Sam's glance to the window brought them all to their feet to look. The cloud was lower now, and there was a heaviness in the morning to hint of rain approaching, but there were men in sight, perhaps a dozen or more hurrying away from the mill in twos and threes.

'That's how it is.' said Sam. 'One after another.'

'Are they going on their own, or is someone calling 'em?'

'Bit of both, if you ask me.'

'All right, Sam. We can't whistle 'em back, so we may as well look pleasant. Tell the others they can have a day off.' 'Off!'

'That's how to put it. Always take credit when you can. Then tell Amos he can shut his engines down and save his coal.

He was back in his figures before Sam was even out of the door, and he showed no sign of any break in concentration even when the rumble of the shafting faltered into a strange silence, quickly broken by a roar of steam from the escape-pipe on the chimney. Nor did he turn his head when a clatter of clogs was heard on the stairs, followed by a babel of voices outside the window. The roar of steam grew less and less, and silence came to the room again, broken only by the scratching of a pen and the quiet sounds of question and answer. It was past ten o'clock when he leaned back in his chair and looked satisfied.

'I think we have it,' he told them quietly, 'I know now what I can offer it at.' He took a last look at his notes and slowly folded them for his pocket; and in the same instant his mood changed and he seemed aware of his surroundings again. 'It seems quiet now. Are we alone in the place?'

'There'll be the doorkeeper, I suppose, and a hand or two besides.'

'Let's leave 'em to it. We'd better know what's happening

in the town. Are you coming up?'

They went with him at once, walking across the green and up to the town in a dim oppressive light. Behind them the sky was black, and a far-off rumbling told of thunder coming, as well it might after these days of heat. They went slowly up the lane, finding it steep and hot in the sultry air, and as they came to Joe Hoyle's factory there was a noise from the street above which was first a drone, and then a roar, and then something which was not quite either. Robert felt his hand tighten on the stick he was now carrying, stout and tipped with lead; and he noted that the others were carrying them too. Nobody had mentioned it, but they were all carrying them.

At the door of his factory they found Joe, standing with his face turned to the noise above, and he too had a stick. Nicholas hailed him curtly.

'What's the row?'

'Clogs.' The answer came as shortly. 'Clogs and tongues, all clacking together.'

'Are your lads working?'

'They damned well are.' Joe was turning the key in the factory door as he spoke. 'I've told 'em, if a man walks out he stays out, and I'll not have him again this side of hell.'

He fell into step with them for the last few yards up the hill, and then they stood watching a street that was a solid throng of people. There were women in plenty at the sides, and excited children too, but the crowd in the centre was of men, and they did not seem to know what they were trying to do. They were moving aimlessly about, truculent and noisy, and most of them carried sticks. The voices were continuous, some in angry speeches and some in exchange and banter, but all were noisy, and they blended with the ceaseless chatter of the clogs. Two men by the corner of the lane had pouches of stones, ominous and ready. Nicholas turned grimly to Joe.

'Are those Justices of ours doing anything?'

'I've not seen 'em. They should be at Bolton's office. He's their Clerk.'

'Then we'll go and look. Keep together. We'll have to cross the street.'

They were grasping their sticks as they followed him, but he seemed no more disturbed than if he had been pushing through farmers in a cattle market. He used his shoulders when he had to, and he turned like lightning on two men who came lurching into him from the side.

'Stop throwing your feet out sideways,' he told them. 'What the hell do you think I am? A shuttle?'

'Eh, I'm sorry if we shoved you, Mr. England. We---'

'Feet too big. That's what's wrong with you. Come on, now. Get us through this lot.'

'Aye, aye.'

The man turned, with a broad grin on his face, and thereafter he and his mate went first, shoulder to shoulder, to clear a way; and when they were across the street Nicholas turned to him again.

'Thanks,' he said briefly. 'What are you lads doing here,

anyway?'

'Well, I-I don't rightly know.'

'I thought you didn't. It's time you went home and had your dinners.'

'Aye, it is.' The man's face hardened suddenly, and there was a new note in his voice. 'And it's time the kids had theirs, too.'

'Oh hell!' It came softly and ruefully, in the tone of a man who knows he has made a blunder. 'What have they had this week?'

'Nettles. That's what mine have had. Boiled bloody nettles.'

'God!' It was hardly heard in the din of the street. 'There'd have been oatmeal today if it hadn't been for this damned row of yours. Here——' He pushed a couple of shillings at the man. 'Now don't say it.'

'I've not said owt yet.'

'You were just going to. It's for the kids, not you. Let 'em say no if they want to. That's all.'

He thrust coins as quickly to the other man, and then he was pushing his way along the street in search of Harry Bolton, the attorney who was also the Justices' Clerk. The office was set a little back from the other buildings, and as they came near it he jerked his head up suddenly.

'Do you see the window?'

It was Bolton's window he was looking at. The upper glass had a great jagged hole, black in the grey light, and with dangerous pointed edges. Dick Bradley was the first to comment.

'I don't like this. It just wants one fool to do something silly, and—'

They came to the locked door, and Nicholas jerked angrily at the bell-knob while the others closed round him. Then he turned, putting his back to the door and gazing into the crowd again, and it seemed as if his thoughts had gone to the man who had spoken of nettles for his children.

'Pity we hadn't young Thornber with us,' he said curtly.

'He might have listened to that bit.'

'Aye, aye,' said Dick. 'But where is Thornber?'

'What do you mean?'

'I'm wondering if this crowd have been down there.'

'Heil!' He turned suddenly to Joe. 'Do you think they've been to Thornber's?'

'A good lot of 'em seemed to be coming back from there.

About an hour gone, that was.'

'Dick——' He ignored the key that turned in the lock behind him, and he took no notice of the clerk who had opened the door and was beckening to them to come in quickly. 'Dick, I want you and Shaw to go down Spring Lane and find out about Thornber. I don't think it's too bad just now. Can you?'

'We'll try.'

'Right. When you're back you may find me here or just anywhere. You'll have to guess. Good luck!'

He turned away, slipping quickly through the door, and Joe promptly pushed in after him. The door slammed shut, and for a moment Robert was staring at the dingy face of it.

'That's like Joe,' he remarked acidly. 'He'll push in anywhere.'

'No, he won't,' said Dick. 'He'll push in where the bigwigs

are, and that's all. Now, what about Spring Lane?'

They pushed their way down the street, keeping close to the houses, making no display of their sticks and doing what they could to avoid trouble. Fortunately it was for no great distance, and soon the crowd was noticeably thinner. Beyond the churchyard the street was empty, and they were able to step out freely. The thunder was nearer now, and the rumblings of it more frequent. Above them the clouds were streaked with angry yellow, and away to their left the black was deep and threatening. A jagged flash leaped across it as they looked, and Dick stepped out in a longer stride.

'We're going to get wet,' he said cheerfully. 'Though I'd sooner have that than the crowd up yonder. You heard Nick's

back-chat with that fellow in the street?'

'Yes.' The thunder from the recent flash came rolling and reverberating, and Robert had to wait for the end of it before he could go on. 'I wish I could learn how he does it.'

'It's a gift from God, not something you can learn.'

They turned into Spring Lane, with the black clouds rearing behind them, where the sun had been in those heated afternoons, and Robert's thoughts were of Nicholas again; and of Anna too, who had the same trick of the vivid answer, the same knack of seeing everyone as a human being. And Podgy Thornber saw nobody as a human being except himself; the others were names in a pay-list.

They were close to the mill now, and it looked as deserted as it had done in the afternoons. No doubt it had been opened for work this morning, and then abandoned, as St. Helen's mill had been; but no one had troubled here to put the shutters up.

'Where's Thornber?' Robert spoke sharply as its possible

meaning broke upon him. 'I don't like this.'

He was scanning the windows anxiously, half expecting to see Tom Thornber with a shotgun in his hand. They hammered at the bolted door and had no answer. They walked right round the mill, where the grass was trodden flat from yesterday, and saw no trace of him. Then, in increasing anxiety, they went to the house and pulled firmly at the bell. They could hear it jangling, and then there was disturbance of curtains at a window, and a face peeping through. Soon there was the turn of a key and the slide of bolts, and a parlour-maid opened the door. Behind her was Ann Thornber, whom Robert had met here the other day.

'Is your brother here?' he asked quickly.

'Oh, not now. He---'

Another peal of thunder swept her words away, and then there was a little puff of wind, hot and unexpected.

'Oh, will there be a storm?' she asked.

'I expect so. But about Mr. Thornber, please?'

'I've told you, he's gone. Oh, do please come in. We mustn't

stand by the door if there's a storm.'

He stepped gravely in, and in the dark gloomy hall he faced her, recognizing now that the woman was distraught, and that there was more to this than a fear of thunder.

'It's been dreadful.' He heard the shrill edge in her tone and he knew that she was trying to keep it down. 'I can't tell you the things they said to Tom. They were screaming at him.'

'Weavers, you mean? This morning?'

'Hundreds of them. Tom was only trying to give out work to them, and that's what they've been asking for, isn't it?' 'But Mr. Thornber wasn't hurt?'

'He shut the door on them. But the noise they made!'

'Quite so. But---'

'He was only giving out work. It was because of the Queen, he said, and I can't tell you what they shouted about her. And the King lying dead, too!'

'But where is Mr. Thornber?'

'He's gone up to see the Justices. He wouldn't stay for anything.'

'The Justices?' He nodded, and hurriedly he suppressed all comment. 'Well, I'm very much obliged to you, Miss Thornber. But now, I think, we should go up there ourselves.'

There was a nod of agreement from Dick Bradley, and a

sound of dismay from Ann.

'But you won't leave us, Mr. Shaw? With this storm coming——'

'I'm afraid we shall have to go.' He said it firmly, though he was watching her unhappily. 'I don't think the storm will

do any harm. And it may pass us by.'

A flash ripped the sky at that very instant to turn his words to nonsense. He saw her jump back, and there was a little cry of alarm from the parlourmaid. He turned to the door with an angry thought of Tom Thornber, who had left two frightened women alone in this gloomy house with a bedridden old man. But the storm was the lesser thing. It had no doubt been the outburst from the weavers that had put them in this mood.

'I'm afraid we must really go,' he said. 'But there's nothing

to be alarmed about. Keep away from windows.'

'Oh, and fireplaces too.'

'Yes. But you'll be quite safe in corners. And I expect your brother will be home soon.'

He led firmly to the door, and Dick was as firmly with him. The door shut behind them, and it was a relief to be in the open air again, in spite of the ominous stillness and the vast pall of black that was hanging above the town. It seemed to be closing upon them now, pressing upon their spirits, giving a sense of doom and wrath; and when Dick spoke his voice was almost startling in the quiet.

'I still think we're going to get wet,' he said. 'Where do you think Thornber is?'

'At Bolton's place, I suppose. But he may have left there by now.'

'Then he'll probably get wet too. But he isn't short of stuff-

ing. He can't be, if he's gone up there this morning.'

They had climbed the lane now, and the buzz and roar of the crowd could be plainly heard. Down the slope, in the other direction, the turnpike road dropped steeply through the fields to the bridge over the river, and the only buildings in sight were the ruined manor house and the clean new parsonage. It should have been a scene of solitude, but a man and woman were walking steadily up the slope, scarcely fifty yards away. The man was the Reverend Mr. Henderson, of the parish church. The woman at his side was Ellen England.

'Oh ho!' said Dick, 'Didn't Nick say those two were doing something with oatmeal?'

'For weavers' porridge. But they'll hardly spoon out oatmeal in a riot, so what are they up to?'

'We'll wait and see.'

They had to wait patiently, for Ellen was taking the slope slowly, and Henderson was keeping to her gentle pace. Once again her flow of talk did not seem to be disturbed, and at five yards distance she was calling out to them cheerfully.

'Good morning, Mr. Bradley! This is a surprise.'

'Good morning, ma'am. You're not going up the street, I hope?'

'Why shouldn't I?'

'I'm afraid it isn't very safe up there. The weavers are a little noisy.'

'I can hear them, when this thunder will let me.'

'How bad is it, Mr. Bradley?'

The curate intervened, suddenly and firmly, and Dick turned to him with relief.

'It could become anything, and I think Mrs. England would be wise to go down the lane here to her sister.'

'I shall not go down to Ann. I have my husband's dinner to see to.' She spoke calmly and obstinately. 'Perhaps you will all walk up with me?'

'Very well.'

They went slowly up the hill together, under the black clouds and the rumble of thunder, and Robert found himself with the curate. Henderson's comment was sharp.

'I could almost wish,' he said, 'that the storm would break. It might make her hurry, and nothing else will.'

'I don't know why she came out at all, with the streets like this.'

'She was thinking of this oatmeal. That's to her credit, of course, but it's one thought at a time with Mrs. England, and she can be very obstinate.'

It was the thought he had had of her the other day, and for an instant he was wondering how far she would persist in her scheme of match-making for brother Tom. Then he made himself forget her, as he began to consider what the chances were of passing through the street without trouble. The crowd was perhaps bigger than before. It extended farther down the street now, and there were people in sight below the church. The noise could be clearly heard, and even while he listened it seemed to increase sharply. Yet to go through did not seem impossible. Ellen was not disliked, and Henderson had been in the town for many a year. There might be no difficulty, if nothing unexpected happened.

But it did happen, and the way of it was frightening. They were level with the church when the noise swelled suddenly to a babel of shouts and boos, with a deeper undertone of anger. In the same moment the movement began, a movement of people down the street, and it was no trickle in twos and threes. It was a river of people, moving slowly, an inexorable flow that was not to be resisted or argued with. They were taking no account of any who might be in front, and Dick Bradlev did not hesitate. In one swift movement he swung the churchvard gate, and his other arm pushed Ellen in. Henderson was at her side in the same moment, and he joined with Dick in hurrying her up the path to the big protruding porch. The shouts and boos of the crowd had risen to frenzy as Robert, coming anxiously behind them, paused with his hand on the gate for a last glance up the street. A swirl in the crowd opened a gap through which he could see, and at once he knew what the trouble was. Down the street, hard against the houses, a man was walking alone, walking in a space the crowd had left for him. He was solitary, shunned as if he were noxious, and he was Tom Thornber.

He was walking steadily, refusing to be hurried, and he was looking stonily to his front, with no turn of his head to the hooting crowd. He was ignoring them, and only his strained face and the readiness of his loaded stick gave hint that he knew they were there. He was giving no more heed to his

other side, and he never turned his head as he came down the churchyard wall, but Ellen had seen him. She slipped suddenly away from Henderson and went running down the path to meet him. He checked in his walk; and the spell that had seemed to hold the crowd was broken.

They surged at him, hooting and roaring. He whipped round to face them, his stick ready and his jaw tight and angry, and in the same instant a stone came hissing at his head. It caught his hat, knocking it over his face so that for the moment he was blind. There was a roar from the crowd, and then another stone, better aimed, which hit his head. He lurched and staggered, stumbling blindly towards the open gate, and Robert came suddenly into his wits again. One long-limbed stride was enough and then he had Tom by the shoulders and was sweeping him through the gate. In the same instant Dick was there to help, and together they hustled him to the porch. Behind them the crowd was roaring, and for the moment it was Henderson who faced them alone, majestically waving them back.

He gained some needed seconds, but it was for a moment only. There was pressure from the back of the crowd, and the river of men came surging forward. Then, higher in the street, a whistle shrilled, peremptory and commanding, and four men were thrusting fiercely through the crowd to the upper gate of the churchyard. Nicholas England was the first of them, with Justice Wood at his side. Close behind them were Harry Bolton, the attorney, and Asquith, the ageing constable. His whistle was still blowing and his white staff waving as he pushed through the gate after the others. The crowd was through both gates now, angry and inexorable.

In the porch they had dropped Tom Thornber on the stones for whatever help his sister could give. The others were standing under the archway to face the hooting crowd, and the shrilling of the whistle brought a moment of respite, which gave the newcomers time to reach the porch. At the side of the arch three stone steps had once been built, for precisely the purpose of making announcements, and William Wood leaped to the topmost step at once, to read from a paper in his hand, while the din and shouting of the crowd drowned every word he said. Nicholas was more practical. The sharp jerk of his head was command enough and between them they took Thornber by

the elbows and pushed him into the church. Ellen went after him, and Nicholas shut the door firmly on them.

'That's better,' he said calmly. 'They'll cool better if they don't see him.'

A stone hurtled into the porch, hitting the door with a resounding crack, and he jumped aside with startled haste. The magistrate was still on the steps, with the constable's staff fluttering wildly at his side. At his other side Bradley and Henderson were trying to persuade him down. The mob was almost at his feet, roaring and seething, the first of them hardly a yard away. From the rear another stone came screaming, hitting the archway above his head, and Dick seized his coattails, pulling him down by main force as a third stone went crashing into the wrought-iron lantern above the porch. The glass splintered, tinkling from the iron to the stones below, and for a moment the curate was standing in furious anger, his hands uplifted as if he would call the wrath of Heaven upon those desecrators of his church.

It almost seemed that he was answered. A streak of flame, jagged and blinding, leaped across the sky, and the thunder followed in the instant, bellowing and reverberating. There was a moment of silence, with the crowd startled and hushed, then a puff of angry wind and a few drops of rain. Faces were upturned as the lightning leaped again, blue and vicious, and the bang of the thunder set windows rattling and the echoes pealing in the hills. Then the rain came hissing down, a solid deluge that swished and roared, splashing from the stones, pouring from the roofs, drenching and blinding everyone. The crowd swayed and shook, turning this way and that to escape. Voices rose in dismay, and men were running for shelter as lightning ripped the clouds again.

'Good!' Nicholas spoke calmly as the cannonade of thunder

set more men running. 'That'll damp their tempers.'

BAYONETS

Behind them the church door creaked, hardly to be heard above the splashing of the rain, and Nicholas turned sharply. He was crisp and compelling, as he pushed Tom Thornber out of sight again, but the others hardly spared a glance for that. The crowd was thinner now, as more and more went running for any kind of shelter, and William Wood attempted his duty yet again. Harry Bolton was now in the porch, blowing and puffing as he shook the water from his hat and skyblue coat, and he stood with the magistrate while the Riot Act was read for the second time. 'Chargeth and commandeth...' The words came gustily, lost in the washing rain, but this was a needed formality: '... immediately to disperse themselves... habitations or lawful business... pains contained in the Act... God save...'

The high-pitched voice was lost, swept into nothing as the lightning leaped again from the clouds, flaring to the ground at some vague point beyond the houses. The thunder was a shattering detonation that seemed to split the ears, and then, as if a tap had turned, the swish of rain became a roar, and the air seemed a solid sheet of water, pelting to the ground in fury. It hid everything, blotting out even the crowd in a curtain of streaking water, and the noise of it filled the whole arch of sky. The lightning ripped through the clouds again, a sizzling glare that lighted the shining roofs and the streaming stones. It showed the end of the crowd, forlorn figures with heads bowed and hands on collars, as they jostled each other through the gates, caring for nothing now but escape. The rain seemed to wash them out of sight, leaving the churchyard to the gravestones, to the splashing puddles and the watchers in the porch.

For a moment they did not move. They were dazed by the fury of it, numbed by the sense of relief at passing danger, and they stood silent while the fury spent itself and let them see at least to the street again. Then Nicholas found his voice.

'It's damped 'em all right.' He stared out at it for a moment, while the lightning flashed again and the thunder went banging

down the street, 'Anyway, they're gone, and that's what matters.'

'If they don't come back,' said Bolton darkly.

'They won't come back in this.'

'But it may stop, sir, it may stop, and we'll be safer with the Hussars.' He was feeling for his watch in his fob as he spoke. 'When will they be here?'

'When did you send for them?'

'As soon as we heard Thornber's tale. That would be an hour ago.'

'Then it will be another hour before they're here. But speak-

ing of Thornber, how is he?'

He turned abruptly to the door behind him, and the others followed him into the church. The last of the grey light faded as the door swung to behind them, and the nave was all but dark. They found Tom on a bench below the organ gallery, stretched full-length with his head on a prayer book she had found as a pillow, and he grunted at them as they came across.

'What the hell's happening?'

'Tom, you're in church. You mustn't speak like that.' Ellen was soothing and reproaching him in one, and then she turned quickly to her husband. 'Nicholas, what is happening out there?'

Suddenly he was at her side as another glare of light came in, giving a noonday brightness and then a deeper black. His arm was round her as the thunder followed, rolling from wall to wall in this cavern of stone, and then he was gentle and firm. 'You're coming home, my dear. I don't know why you were ever out this morning, but you're coming home.'

'But there's Tom. His head's cut open. It was that stone.'

'Don't fret, my dear.' He swung suddenly round. 'What's it like outside? Will one of you have a look?'

It was a little better than it had been. Dick went quickly to the porch, Robert with him, and together they peered out into the grey downpour. It was torrential, and the echoes of the thunder never seemed to die. But there was a little more light than there had been, and a gentle wind was blowing from the north, putting a slant on the rain. They noted this at once. It would mean some shelter in the lee of buildings as they made for Cumberland House.

They made the best they could of it, splashing along a deserted street. There were folk in alleyways, and sheltering in

doorways, and once there was an ironic cheer as the tight-packed group went by. There were only five of them now. The constable had been detached to see the curate home. Dick turned away to summon Mr. Buck, the surgeon, and Harry Bolton plunged quickly into his own office. The others went on, Nicholas supporting his wife, and Robert holding tight to a strangely acquiescent Thornber, and soon they were at Cumberland House, passing up a stair that was dim and dark to a parlour that Robert knew. This was where Anna had sat in the sunlit window, with a cushion cover in her hands.

It was not a sunlit window now; nor, for the moment, did he have a chance to cherish memories. There was no sign of Susie today, but in the window, as the men tramped in, were two other girls. One was the young Betsy who had been with Anna in the churchyard, and one was a slender thirteen-year-old whom Robert had not seen before. Nicholas was brisk with her.

'Fanny lass, we want a drink. We all want a drink.'

She jumped up, a girl very much in Susie's mould, and looked pleased at being called upon. She busied herself at the walnut sideboard while Betsy made straight for her father.

'No, lass.' He was playfully ruffling her hair as he spoke. I'm busy. Much too busy for a face like yours. You go and help Fanny.'

The tinkling of the front-door bell was heard as Betsy went trotting to the sideboard, and almost at once there were heavy feet on the stair as Dick came up with a big calm man who was Mr. Buck, the surgeon. Ellen took charge of him, and she went from the room with him and Tom. Nicholas drank at his brandy, and then addressed himself to the magistrate.

'What now?' he asked cheerfully.

'I suppose we must draft this proclamation. But it's not the one we ought to be drafting. We should be drafting a proclamation of the Queen's accession, not one about Special Constables. We're also supposed to be in mourning for the King. Has anybody thought of that?'

'We've had a little more to think about.'

'It's scandalous. A King to mourn and a Queen to make allegiance to—and we have to read the Riot Act and call Hussars!'

'You'd better have another brandy.'

'Er—thank you.' He surrendered his glass promptly enough to Fanny. 'And what's at the end of it all?'

'Oh, it'll settle down. They'll have to be paid a bit more though.'

'I meant for the nation. A state of sedition that we've never known before, and we have a child of eighteen set to govern us!'

'I expect she'll get older.'

'What? I---'

The bell went pealing again below, and now it was Harry Bolton who came tramping up the stair in company with a thick-set man in breeches and riding boots who was James Foulds of Trawden, another magistrate. Bolton was looking displeased as he flung a sheaf of papers to the table.

'Well, here we are,' he said shortly. 'Mr. Foulds is with me, as you wished. Though why these affairs couldn't be conducted

in my office, I don't know.'

'You seem to have a window broken.' Nicholas gave the answer cheerfully, while he gestured to Fanny at the sideboard. 'So the Justices are better here.'

'It's disgraceful. Er—thank you, Fanny. Broken windows indeed, and in my office! Who's going to pay for it?'

'You are. Unless you leave it broken.'

'How can I leave it broken?'

'It would let the air in.' There was a distinct twitch of the eyebrows now. 'Why does an attorney's office always stink?'

'What the devil do you mean?'

'Ink, snuff, dead men's wills, and a good thick layer of muck. That's what they stink of, and yours is worse than most. Does that brandy suit you?'

'I'm much obliged.'

'You don't look it.' Nicholas leaned comfortably against the fireplace. 'How about the printer? If you want this proclamation out tonight, it mightn't be too soon to be warning him.'

'Could you do that?'

'Yes. Dick, will you slip out and have a word with Earnshaw? Tell him he's to be ready for it. And if you see any Hussars, bring the officers back with you.'

Dick went out, with a rueful glance at the streaming window. The two magistrates settled at the table, with Nicholas and Harry Bolton, and began to discuss the names of men who could be impressed as Special Constables. Robert found him-

self a seat in the window, where Fanny promptly came after him with a drink he did not want. Then her attention was diverted again as feet sounded on the stair once more. This time it was the surgeon departing after tending his patient, and soon he was seen in the street, making what he could of his dignity as he dodged the streams of water that were splashing from the roofs. Both girls pressed their faces to the glass to watch him, and even Robert stole a quick glance. Behind him he heard Bolton begin to read the draft of the proclamation: '... Thomas Thornber the Younger ... persons riotously and tumultuously assembled together ... whereupon the said Thomas Thornber ... and we do hereby nominate and appoint several persons ... to act as Special Constables...'

From the street another noise broke in, a sound of horses, clattering and jingling, swelling louder and louder. There was a gasp of delight from the girls at the window, and Nicholas pushed his chair from the table. Robert looked over the heads of the excited children, and not fifty yards away were the Hussars, rank after rank of them, walking their horses cautiously on the streaming cobbles. An officer rode at their head, and at his side was Dick Bradley, keeping pace with the walking horse. He seemed to be pointing out the archway of the Angel Inn, and the officer was leaning from his saddle as he listened. Then a bawled command brought the troop to a halt, and Betsy was squeaking with excitement as the officer dismounted and walked with Dick to the door. Nicholas pulled gently at Fanny's ear.

'Go and let 'em in,' he said. 'I'm sure you'd like to.'

She went at a run, while he caught suddenly at Betsy to keep her from following. They heard the door flung open, and the tramp of feet on the stair, and a jingle of spurs. Then William Wood went forward as Dick brought the officer in, a big man, holding himself stiffly. He announced himself formally.

'Major Phillips, Fifteenth Hussars. Commanding at Burnley. Where are your rioters, sir?'

'For a moment they seem to have dispersed. This storm, you understand——'

'It all but washed us from the road.' For a moment he was smiling grimly as he opened his sodden cloak. 'But I suppose they can re-form, so we'd better trot round the streets and show ourselves. That may help a little.'

'I expect it would,' said Nicholas suddenly. 'But it can wait while you have a drink. Brandy?'

'Well-er-'

There was an instant clink of glass from a self-important Fanny, who had been waiting by the sideboard. The Major's face relaxed as he stooped, smiling, to take it from her. Then he spoke again to Wood.

'There's a party of infantry coming too, a company of the Ninety-Seventh. They're marching now, and I suppose they'll be here within an hour. I can leave them with you for a day or two, and that may be useful. I must return with the Hussars this afternoon, and they'll need a dinner first, and of course there are the horses. Can you arrange for that?'

'The Angel,' said Dick quietly. 'I've pointed it out. They've

more stables than any other.'

'Leave it to us,' said Nicholas crisply. 'You and your officers will please dine here with me. We'll arrange something for the infantry.'

'Thank you. Now I'll show my troop in your town.'

He went heavily down the stair, and again the street rang with shouts of command as the troop went clattering and jingling away, noisily showing the town that the Justices had more behind them than a constable with a painted staff. Nicholas stood with the others to watch them go, and then he took brisk command.

'Dick, you'd better get round to the Angel and tell them what's coming. Men and horses, remember. Fanny, go and tell your mother she'll have two Justices for dinner, and some officers. I don't know how many. This party of infantry had better go to the Fleece and the Derby Arms, and I'll see to that myself. Shaw, you'd better find some blankets for them. About two hundred, I should think.'

He gave no hint of how it was to be done, but Robert accepted that placidly, not displeased that Nicholas should have some faith in him. Nor was it very difficult. He soon remembered Barnard Crook, who had a well-stocked shop and was far more than a cotton merchant. So to the shop he went, and Crook raised no difficulties. The blankets should be sent that afternoon, he said; and he did not even ask who would pay for them.

Robert walked down to the Fleece in search of Nicholas, and he was picking a careful way through the puddles by the

churchyard when he heard from down the street a heavy tramp of feet, firm and steady. Then out of the wet mist came the infantry, a company of the 97th, in scarlet and gold, swinging through the rain in full marching order; and he noted, with a feeling of shock, that they were marching with bayonets fixed. It was a hint, no doubt, that they meant business, and a grim warning of what might come; but for the moment all was quiet, and the officer who led them was very civil when Nicholas intercepted him. He named himself as Captain Cummin, and he seemed well satisfied with the quarters offered. His men filed in, wet, tired and thirsty, and he had a sharp eye for everything before he and his Ensign walked up the street with Nicholas. He was looking as thirsty as his men, and the invitation seemed to please him.

Robert took care to drop behind. He had not been included in the invitation, and he had not wished to be. He knew that Ellen England had guests enough as it was, and it would be a crowded and noisy meal with perhaps more wine and brandy than he cared about. So he walked slowly, letting the others move ahead, and when he came to the market place the Hussars were filing into the Angel yard, no doubt as ready for beer and dinner as the 97th had been. He saw Major Phillips come out, two more officers with him, and make for Cumberland House.

Then Dick Bradley came from the yard.

'All done,' he said cheerfully. 'They're seeing to the horses and the beer's waiting. How's your lot?'

'At the beer already, I should say. Isn't it time we had our own dinners?'

'More than time. Perhaps we'd better meet again after that

and see what's happening.'

They met an hour later, and they strolled quietly down the street. The rain had stopped, and in the warm air the puddles were steaming between the cobbles. The clouds were thinning, and ahead of them there was even a hint of blue in the sky. For the moment it was pleasant, and by the Fleece and the Derby Arms the foot soldiers could be seen, standing about in groups and evidently not called to duty yet. There was a lull in affairs just now, and they walked quietly on down the street together. A mood of friendship was growing between them, and Dick had something to say about his earlier days and how he had come to St. Helen's mill. He had been born in Manchester, he said, and he had started work there at the age of twelve, when

his father died. He had struggled slowly up, learning to read and write in a Sunday School, until at twenty-six he had been clerk and general handyman to an insecure cotton merchant, and it was here that he had first met Nicholas, who occasionally came to that office on business. Then the cotton merchant slipped into bankruptcy, and Dick was in search of another job when he chanced to meet Nicholas, who had promptly carried him off for a chop and a pint of porter. That had been two years ago, when St. Helen's mill was building, and the invitation to go there as clerk had come before the chop was finished. Dick had spluttered out his acceptance with his mouth still full of chop, and he had never regretted it.

They turned and began to walk slowly up the hill again, with Robert brooding on what he had just heard. He thought it

explained something.

'I did think,' he said, 'that you knew a lot about these working men—their feelings about supporting other trades, and so

on. Does that come from those Manchester days?'

'I'm not sure what you mean. But I know what it's like to go looking for work when you haven't had a breakfast and don't see a dinner. Have you noticed that Nick has a feeling for them too?'

'He didn't like their stones this morning.'

'Nor did I. But I don't like boiled nettles, either. But what the devil!'

His tone had suddenly changed. Down the street a little cavalcade was coming. First came a corporal of Hussars, riding alone; then a black and red gig, with a Hussar riding at each wheel; then six more Hussars, two by two behind it. They were coming steadily down the hill, every detail clear in the rain-washed air, and the driver of the gig was Ellen England. Her companion was Tom Thornber, squat and bulky in the narrow seat.

'Look at it!' said Dick.

He sounded incredulous, and Robert shared his feeling. The gig was turning into Spring Lane now, and he saw the white reins tighten as Ellen steadied the horse for the steep descent.

Evidently she was competent with a gig. But Tom Thornber with an escort of Hussars was a sight hardly to be expected. No doubt he was being taken home, and no doubt he was safer with an escort. But even so——

'I'll guess who thought of that,' said Dick. 'Nick wouldn't

keep Tom longer than he had to. He doesn't like him well enough.'

'But Hussars!'

'Nick again. He wines and dines the officers, and then gets what he wants. It's just like him.'

They went quietly up the street together, as a shaft of sunlight came suddenly through the clouds. It brought a gleam from the wet cobbles and lent a touch of colour to the houses, and by the church it found a richer colour, the scarlet and gold of the Foot as they mustered by the churchyard wall. Then Captain Cummin walked out of the Fleece, and there was a click of heels as they jumped to attention. In another minute they were being marched away in platoons, presumably to patrol the streets, as the cavalry had done in the morning.

Outside the Angel the Hussars were making ready amid a throng of spectators. Already they were mounted, sitting their horses while they waited. Major Phillips was in talk with Nicholas and the Justices, and all of them seemed to be waiting. Then there was a ring of trotting hooves, and round the bend came the gig once more, still with its attendant Hussars. Ellen was alone in it now, and Major Phillips was punctilious in salute as she brought it neatly to the door. Then he mounted, and at once the whole Troop were moving, jingling down the street as they began their return to Burnley. They rode with a swagger now, gay with their sabres and busbies and their cloaks thrown open in the sun to show their frogged jackets, and there were squeals of delight from the children and even a few faint cheers from the others. Then, through the afternoon, the town was quiet while the infantry patrolled the streets, and the only development was the appearance of men with paste and brushes, who stuck posters very freely on walls and doors. These were the hastily printed copies of the proclamation about Special Constables, and the formal announcement was followed by a list of some seventy names. It included almost everyone of substance in the town. Nicholas was in it. and Holroyd and Barnard Crook. So was Mr. Buck the surgeon, and Harry Bolton himself, who had written the list. It was sharp summons and short notice for all of them, but apparently it was obeyed, as Robert noted when he walked slowly up the street in the early evening. In Market Street, outside Bolton's office, a half-dozen men were standing, and there were others by the Hole i' th' Wall. He recognized some

of them, cotton men or shopkeepers of note, and they were now the Special Constables, come to be sworn before the Justice, and then going across for a drink. He glanced inside the tavern and found it noisy; and he had a quick thought that some might be seeking courage there for what the dark might bring. Not many looked truculent.

It was some two hours later that he heard the first real sounds of trouble. He was then thinking of bed, and he had just climbed to his bedroom when he heard the noises from the street outside, the shouting of voices and the tinkle of breaking glass. He pushed up his window, which faced the street, and looked out. The sun had set an hour before, and it was all but dark, in spite of a lightness to the east that told of a rising moon. A babel of voices was still to be heard along the street. but a bend in it cut his view. He leaned from the window, trying to make out more, and dimly he could see dark figures near Bolton's office. The noise seemed closer now, and suddenly a man came running, shouting a warning as he ran to the office door. Down the street, lost in the dark, a drum was beating urgently, and its stern precision told plainly what it was. The soldiers were turning out, and their drum was beating to arms.

By the office there was a glow of light, as if someone had opened a door, and by it he could see other men joining the group in the street. Then they were advancing, and at the head of them he could see the tall figure of William Wood. From along the street there was another tinkle of glass, and then a roar of exultation from the crowd. He watched anxiously; and the thought was in him that he ought not to be safe at a window, but down in the street with those others whom Wood was leading so steadily towards the noise. But that, as he told himself, was not his fault; he had not been called, and might not be welcomed. Then the note of the drum took his ear again. It had changed its rhythm now and was beating a march, and it was nearer than it had been.

A gleam of moonlight, pale and watery, lit the street as the drifting cloud opened. But the Special Constables had passed from his view beyond the bend, and the street was empty, though all along it he could see heads at upper windows. By the church the drum was louder, and a tramp of boots could be heard, ringing hard on the stones. Then, from beyond the bend, there were bellowing shouts of anger, and the loud

sharp clatter of stick on stick. It was ominous and not to be mistaken, the weavers' sticks and the constables' batons; and through it came the beat of drums and the clack of marching boots.

The affray was short, as it was bound to be. These were Special Constables, hastily enrolled. They were not trained, nor disciplined, nor practised in the use of batons, and it lasted a bare half-minute. Then they were in sight again, disorderly now, and for the moment a broken force. Some had lost their hats, some were limping, some holding their heads as if staggering after a blow; and with them came the first of the mob, dangerous with sticks and belts, yelling in triumph as they swept authority before them. The moon shone brighter for an instant, and from down the street the note of the drums changed suddenly. Captain Cummin was past the church now, and could see what was happening; and he was bringing his men at the double.

They met almost under Robert's window. The constables came swarming past him as they fell back, a few in utter disorder, but most of them still facing the mob and resisting stoutly. He saw William Wood among them, unarmed and taking no part in this, but certainly taking all the risks, but he could pick out no other in the swirl and confusion of it. The noise was deafening as the shouting and jeering spread to the whole long column of the crowd, stretching back out of sight beyond the bend. For an instant his eyes lifted from the turmoil, and he was looking to an upper window of Cumberland House, where Ellen England was leaning anxiously out, no doubt wondering where her husband was. Then the bawling voices changed suddenly as the soldiers came.

They came at a run which did not spoil their precision. They had done this work before, and they did it with a disciplined certainty. The wave of an officer's arm was enough for the 97th, and their column seemed to change its shape, flowing in two ranks across the street, shoulder to shoulder from houses to houses, utterly blocking the way. Someone had judged it perfectly, and only when it was done could it be seen that they had threaded between the combatants and separated them. The constables were behind them, breathless and exhausted, some collapsing on the road as they relaxed at last. The mob was beyond the dark line of tunics, and the bayonets were wicked

in the moonlight, a shining hedge of steel, levelled and unwavering.

The noise was suddenly more distant, those in front hushed by the shock of it, and at once the magistrate took his chance. Weary as he must have been, he spoke quickly to Captain Cummin. There was a thunderous roll of the drum, prolonged. and then dying into silence. As it faded he stepped in front of the bayonets, and his high voice could be heard reciting again the words of the Riot Act which he must now have known by heart: 'Our Sovereign Lady the Oueen chargeth and commandeth . . .' He was still speaking when a fellow in the seething crowd loosed a shout of defiance, almost under his nose. It came suddenly, startling in its unexpectedness, and it was the spark to the tinder. It touched something in the others, rousing their lawless mood again. There was a surging and stamping, and a deep-throated roar, and then a stone came hurtling from the rear. It all but took his hat, and another followed, heard more than seen, setting two soldiers flinching as it hissed between their heads.

There was no hesitation in Captain Cummin. With a push he swept the magistrate back, and the ranks closed instantly. Then he wheeled about. There were two snapped orders, hardly heard in the din, and a sheet of flame, leaping the whole width of the street, and a shattering detonation, deafening in the space between the houses. Without a moment's pause the front rank dropped on one knee to reload. The rear rank stood at the ready, and the crowd surged and swaved.

It had been a blank discharge, intended only to frighten. The smoke went drifting, swirling in the wind of the summer night, and then all seemed as before. Men took heart again, and from the back of the crowd came angry shouts and a pressure forward. Captain Cummin stood tense and watchful. He had taken command now, and he was no longer deferring to the magistrate. He stood for perhaps a quarter-minute. Then, his voice snapped in command, and again smoke drifted, again the crowd jumped back and swayed uncertainly. It was no blank discharge this time. The rear rank had been fully loaded, and the scream of the balls through the street and above the housetops had a prompt effect. It touched the rear of the crowd as fully as the front, and the sway and surge was more back than forward now. Instantly, as he saw it, he pressed his advantage. His front rank were ready again now, fully loaded with ball.

and at once he used them. A third volley flamed, and again the shot went screaming in menace above the heads of the shaking men. They began to give ground, some on the fringes running for side streets, while shouts of alarm and warning rose. The entire crowd was swaying, stunned and uncertain, and nothing was lost on the watchful officer. His orders crackled; and slowly his men moved forward into attack, their bayonets levelled before them.

It was the end. It was too much for frightened and uncertain men, unused to anything like it. Something near panic took those in front. They pressed back, then turned about and tried to run for it, pushing themselves against those behind, and the movement spread quickly as panic flared. The trickle down the side streets became a torrent, and within a minute, as the infantry kept to their slow march forward, the whole mass of the crowd was moving, first shambling and then running. All unity had gone. They were separate frightened men now, not a crowd. They were thinking of escape, not riot, and their threat was gone. Behind them the bayonets glinted, moving steadily forward, and behind the bayonets the magistrate was active again. Swiftly he gathered his Special Constables into order, advancing with them behind the soldiers.

In the upper windows the tension broke. Watchers breathed again, and heads withdrew. Robert quietly pulled his window down and lit his candle. For the moment they could sleep in peace, thanks to the courage of William Wood and the firmness of Captain Cummin. Tomorrow it might be different, but that must wait. It had been too long a day for more thinking.

11

MANAGEMENT

THAT should have been the end of the matter; and so it might have been if Thomas Lonsdale had not fallen over a lamp bracket. He was a cotton manufacturer, out with a party of Special Constables; and later that night, in the wet darkness of Colne Lane, he fell over a wrought-iron bracket which someone had left in the street outside Joe Hoyle's factory. Lonsdale was unlucky. He caught his toe in the thing, went headlong, and broke his collar-bone as he hit the cobbles. The rest of the party told him he had been too long at the Hole i'th' Wall and ought to know better. Then they picked him up and took him home, and by morning the surgeon had set the bone and Lonsdale was comfortable again. The incident was trivial, and nothing much should have followed from it.

But Lonsdale was a cotton man, and was reckoned to have done his duty lately. He had at least been staunch against giving in to the weavers. So when the tale of his hurt got round, some other cotton men thought they ought to call on him and ask how he was. Joe Hoyle thought the same, though for a different reason. He was not a cotton man, and he had no great love for Lonsdale, but there was no getting away from it that the lamp bracket belonged to Joe, and should not have been in the street at all. It was one of a set of four he had made for a customer. He had told an apprentice to put them by the door, ready for despatch, and how one of them got outside the door nobody could tell, least of all the apprentice. Joe laid into him with the buckle end of a belt, and then, feeling that something ought to be done to show good will, he decided to call on Lonsdale and express his regrets. He could always put the blame on the apprentice.

So off went Joe, breathing good will, and Lonsdale was less grateful than he might have been. He had already been visited by three cotton men, who had all asked him what the beer had been like that night, and he was now inclined to be touchy. He said that if Joe must leave his so-and-so lamp brackets littering the streets of the such-and-such town he had better pick them up and stick them on the walls. Then he could put

lamps in them, and the things might be a bit of use, if they didn't come in pieces as soon as someone tried to use them. Joe, never much given to turning the other cheek, told him it was his own fault and he had better not sit so long in the Hole i' th' Wall if he couldn't pick up his feet when he came out. Lonsdale turned purple and asked why Joe hadn't been out with the Special Constables himself. Joe told him to go to hell, and reached for his hat; and there was not much good will left on either side when they parted.

Joe came into the Hole i' th' Wall a little after eleven, and that was how Robert heard of this. He had gone to the mill at the usual seven o'clock that morning, and there had been scarcely a dozen workers in sight, all of them looking tired and pale from the doings of yesterday. Sam declared outright that it was impossible to run even a throstle; there were too few hands, and they were in such a state that he would trust them with nothing. Nicholas promptly confirmed that decision. Work was out for the day, and the few hands who had come could be sent home again and told to go to bed, which would be the best place for them. Then he turned attention to Dick and Robert, and said they could have the day off too. He was too busy to go into figures with them now. It was more important to get the town running again, and he would give his time to that. Then he looked straight at both of them, and said he had heard how they had escorted his wife into the church porch yesterday before the stones flew. That had been well done, and if they would come to the Hole i' th' Wall at eleven he would stand them both a drink.

This being an offer that no man of sense would refuse from his employer, they were there on time, and they found the company they had expected, but with rather more cotton men than usual. Harry Holroyd was there, and Richard Sagar, and even Tom Thornber, seeming none the worse for a bang on his thick head. They were discussing how to get the trade running again, and Nicholas was telling them that they would have to pay their weavers a little more. It was not a popular suggestion.

'Don't be so daft,' growled Thornber. 'We've offered 'em thirteen pence, and they've the damned impudence to say they won't have it. Telling us, mind you! Let's go down to twelve, that's what I say.'

'Then you're about the only one who'll say it. What's it costing you, Harry, to be stopped like this?'

'God knows,' said Holroyd.

'Well, I know what it's costing me. There's the state of the town, too.'

'It won't get any worse. We've the soldiers here now.'

'We've also the mills stopped and the shops shut. We can't go on like this.'

'Then how do we go on?' Sagar pushed himself into the talk suddenly, straddling his stool while his two hands toyed with his tankard. 'What are you telling us, Nick? What's it going to cost us?'

'A penny a piece, I should think. They've asked fifteen and you've offered 'em thirteen. They'd split it at fourteen if you gave 'em the chance.'

'Don't talk as if it isn't much. It's eight per cent. There'll be

no profit left in weaving if we give 'em that.'

'There'll be no profit left in spinning, either, if they smash your throstles. It could happen, you know, and before the soldiers came.'

'I know it could. But if we give 'em this eight per cent, where's it going to end? What's coming next week? Another eight per cent?'

'Belly crawling,' said Thornber suddenly. 'Just what I've been

telling you.'

'Yes.' Nicholas rounded on him instantly. 'You were saying all last week you wouldn't let 'em go back, and then you changed your mind. You had to.'

'That was different,' said Holroyd. 'We weren't giving way

that time. We had a reason to give.'

'You and your Queen-young and lovely.'

'Don't sound so funny. It wasn't our fault it didn't work. But this time we haven't a tale at all. We'd just be giving way.'

It was at this point that Joe arrived from his talk with Lonsdale. He came stamping in, big and noisy, and he cut short the buzz of agreement that had come from the whole room at Holroyd's declaration. His mind was on his own concerns, and he took everybody's interest for granted.

'Pint, Frank!' He shouted it noisily as he came in. 'What's

wrong with Lonsdale?'

'Have you been to see him?' said a voice, 'You and your lamp bracket?'

'The chap's daft. What do you think he said?'

He hooked a stool forward, straddling himself comfortably, and told them the whole tale. Joe was at his best before an audience, and he made a good thing of it. He was showing them the old jovial look before he came to the end.

'And, mind you,' he said, 'I think the chap meant it—this

stuff about sticking 'em on walls with lamps in 'em.'

'Well, isn't it what you make 'em for?'

'Don't be so soft. I made 'em to sell.'

There was a wave of laughter, and then Nicholas looked up from his brandy-and-water. He seemed less amused than the others.

'All the same,' he said quietly, 'Lonsdale was right. We ought to have lamps in brackets, and on stands in the streets too. They've had 'em ten years in Burnley. We're behind the times.'

'Aye, but——' Dick Sagar was looking at him suspiciously, perhaps not sure whether he was in earnest or not. 'But you can't have lamps till we get gas.'

'We ought to have gas.'

'And what do you think that's going to cost?' said Joe. 'It 'ud cost thousands, before you'd done.'

'How much would it cost in lamp brackets? And tubes, and taps, and burners?'

'What's that?'

Joe's mouth dropped open, and then shut like a trap. For a moment his eyes widened, and then his face froze into a mask. He had lost all expression when Tom Thornber cut into the talk.

'Gas is wonderful,' he said solemnly.

They turned as one man to look at him, all except Joe, who seemed lost in his own thoughts now. No one had expected this from Podgy Thornber.

'What the heck do you know about it?' said someone. 'You

don't go to Burnley at night, do you?'

'I go to Manchester, don't I, twice a quarter? They've gas all over the town there. There's a light at every corner.' He turned suddenly to Holroyd, as if for support. 'You've seen 'em, Harry?'

'Aye, I have, and I don't like it. It's dam' dangerous, running flames all round t'town in pipes! Fair mad, if you ask me.'

'Eh, but that's daft.' Tom was half out of his chair suddenly.

'They don't do that with gas. Now I'll tell you. It's like this-

There was a note of excitement in his voice. He sat down again as suddenly as he had risen, and his knuckles were showing white from his grip of the tankard. The others watched in amazement. Tom Thornber riding a hobby horse was something new to everyone.

'Now I'll tell you,' he said fiercely. 'What they do with gas is like this. At the gasworks they have a thing they call a retort.

It's a big---'

Then he was stopped. The door pushed suddenly open, and in walked Harry Bolton, the attorney. There was a flush in his face to hint that he was in one of his indignant moods, and he took everyone's eye at once. They all turned to him, wholly forgetting Tom and his gasworks, and Bolton halted by the door until he was sure they had all seen him.

'Morning, everybody. I'll have a brandy, Anderton, and a

stiff one. I need it.'

'Something wrong?' said Nicholas.

'Good God! Have you been in this town the last twenty-four hours without knowing there's something wrong?'

'Since I was tramping round these streets till two in the morning, which is rather later than you were, I have noticed something.'

'What do you say?' The attorney's voice had risen, and for a moment he was glaring angrily at Nicholas. 'Do you accuse me of neglecting my duty?'

'No. Just of having a more comfortable one. But don't come

here asking silly questions about not knowing.'

The portly attorney was looking ready to choke, and Nicholas sat comfortably back. There was an awkward silence, and then Barnard Crook, who had taken no part in anything, intervened to keep the peace.

'Now stop fratching,' he said calmly. 'There's enough of that in the town without having it here too. Come on, Bolton. Sit you down. Make a bit of room for him, some o' you. Now

what's doing this morning?'

His soothing tone had its effect. Nicholas had no more to say, and Bolton seemed mollified. He settled himself in a chair, and he raised no objection when Sagar waved to the landlord to fill the glasses again.

'Thank you,' he said. 'But as to what is doing, nothing is

doing. We're at a complete standstill.'

'We should have kept the cavalry,' said Sagar.

'Of course we should, but Major Phillips wouldn't listen to us. So we're left with two Hussars and the infantry. That's all.'

'What's the use of two?'

'Mounted messengers, of course, to ride for help if needed.' He sniffed noisily as he took another sip at his brandy. 'Captain Cummin is an excellent officer, and we were glad of him last night, but he and his men aren't enough.'

'What we need,' said Crook, 'is to get folk back to work.'

'Of course it is. And there's something else, too. The Justices have a duty to make public proclamation of the Queen's accession.'

'I know what you mean,' said Crook. 'There's trumpets and drums, and the Justice reads from a bit of paper.'

'But how are we to do it? Proclamation of a queen requires a procession, with soldiers and a band—that sort of thing. Silence, and everybody's hat off while the Justice reads. Then cheers and the National Anthem. Instead of that we'll have weavers spitting and throwing stones. When can you get your men back to work?'

'Monday,' said Nicholas calmly.

'What's that?'

'We were talking about it when you came in, until Tom got loose. Then he started telling us about gasworks.'

'Gasworks!'

'That's right.' Tom Thornber came suddenly back to life, and there was a light in his eyes again as he saw his chance. 'Now at the gasworks they have a thing called a retort, and they put——'

'Shut up,' said Holroyd. 'We'll put you in the ruddy thing if you say any more, and a fine stink o' gas there'll be then. Go

on, Nick.'

'All right.' Nicholas glanced round the circle, and then he addressed himself to Bolton, speaking soberly now and earnestly.

'It's fairly well agreed that they'll have to have fourteen pence the piece to get them back.'

'Hey, wait a minute,' said Holroyd. 'We didn't all say that.'

'No, you didn't say it, but you all know it's true.' He seemed to sweep the objection aside as he turned back to the attorney. 'The only trouble is, it needs an excuse for doing it, or it'll be like giving in to 'em again, twice in a week.'

'Yes?'

'I think you've found it for us. This proclamation of yours sounds just right. Do you see?' He wheeled suddenly on the others. 'We'll do it tomorrow. That's Saturday. Just right.'

'Hey, hey,' said Crook softly. 'It might work.'

'It'll work if I know weavers. Give 'em a real good do—beer and a band and all the rest—and they'll chuck themselves right into it.'

'Beer!' said Holroyd. 'You're not thinking of standing 'embeer, are you?'

'Yes, I am, and you'll be paying your share. Then, d'ye see, we'll tell 'em at the end, when they're all pleased and happy, that they're having an extra penny to celebrate the Queen, and it's starting on Monday. It'll work all right. Now then——' He seemed to assume everyone's agreement as he turned his attention to details. 'We'll have to do this well, you know. If they think we're doing 'em cheap, it won't work. How about expenses?'

They looked at one another doubtfully, and then Dick Sagar seemed to give answer for all of them.

'It's your affair, Nick. You'd better say what you want.'

'Call it a levy, then. Let me see—we've about fourteen thousand spindles in the town. Say a halfpenny a spindle. We can just wet 'em nicely on that. Now we'll need Cummin and his men, of course. Can you see to that, Bolton?'

'I expect he'll oblige the Justices.'

'Then I'll leave him to you. Now the beer. Frank, can you and some other see to that? On Colne Field?'

'Aye, if you want it.'

'I've just said I do. Now the band. Dick——' He turned suddenly to Bradley. 'That's for you. Hire 'em this afternoon and fix what they're to play. Marches first, and dancing on the field. Now the Sunday Schools. You can't have this sort of a do without 'em. I'll talk to my wife about our lot. How about the others?' He wheeled suddenly round again and found Robert sitting quietly in a corner. 'Does that chapel of yours have a Sunday School?'

'Of course it does.'

'Then turn 'em out. Nine-thirty sharp. Tell 'em to dress up. Best whites for everybody.'

'I'll have to see the Elders.'

'See anybody you like, if you don't come back here saying

you can't. Sagar, you're a Methodist, aren't you? Turn your lot out, please. Who's a Baptist here?'

'Joe's half of one.'

'Glad to know it. Same to you, Joe. Don't forget whites. Now, is there anything else?'

'Pies,' said Holroyd.

'What?'

'If the Sunday Schools do a walk, they'll want pies. They always have pies.'

'How many kids?'

'Five or six hundred, if you get 'em all.'

'Six hundred pies then. Hey, Joe---'

'Me again?'

'Yes. See the bakers for me. Eight hundred meat pies.'

'Eight?'

'The band'll want them too, and the soldiers. It won't do to be short. Anything else?'

'Yes,' said Joe gloomily. 'Another ruddy drink.'

It made a crowded afternoon for all of them. All over the town the preparations drove forward. The cryer went out, jangling his bell, to bawl the news at corners, and by late afternoon a fine air of excitement had seized the town. There were knockings in tavern cellars as publicans made sure of the beer, and the street was reeking of baking pies. The soldiers were busy whitening and polishing, watched by an interested crowd, and from somewhere in Waterside came a blare of brass and a thump of drums as the band had a frenzied practice. The churchyard had the biggest crowd of all, for Ellen England and the curate had taken the chance, while the town seemed peaceful, for their promised distribution of oatmeal. Subscriptions had been generous. They had collected nearly a ton of it, and two thousand families had a pound of oatmeal each: which meant that they would at least have a supper tonight and a breakfast tomorrow.

The morning broke fine and clear. The storms were gone, and only a few high clouds were drifting in a flawless blue. A mood of holiday, happy and unexpected, seemed to have gripped the town, and at a quarter to eight the band came trudging up from Waterside for breakfast in the Derby Arms, where Dick Bradley filled them with ham and eggs and beer. He made sure that they had something to blow on, and by nine o'clock he had them down by the parsonage, where the proces-

sion was to start. Already the street was seething with children, watched by a horde of anxious mothers as Sunday School superintendents collected their flocks, and Joe Hoyle, who had some sort of status as a Baptist on Sundays, suddenly appointed himself as marshal of the procession. He was noisy and authoritative about it, and it was generally believed that he had been appointed by the magistrates, a notion which he did not contradict. But he was efficient, and he had all the children in their places with a good ten minutes to spare; and when they began to fidget he suddenly produced from his pockets some bags of brightly-coloured sweets, which he passed along the ranks. He was chuckling and jovial now, and plainly a success. Nicholas lifted an eyebrow and remarked that the sweets must have cost at least a shilling, and that Joe was having value for his money.

Then they were off, sharp at nine-thirty. First came the two Hussars, very smart and soldierly in their fine frogged jackets and their gleaming boots; then the two magistrates, side by side on horseback with their clerk and the curate, who were also mounted. Captain Cummin followed, and after him came his company of infantryman, very stiff and erect in their dignified slow march. Then came the band, and certainly they were giving value for the ham and eggs. They could be heard a mile away, and that was the main thing. Even the notables of the town, who followed the band, seemed to be within its spell, and to be picking up their feet and marching with a swagger they would have laughed at on any other day. These were the cotton men, some divines from the chapels, a group of surgeons and attorneys, and Joe Hoyle, who had hurriedly abandoned his Sunday Schools and slipped himself among the notables. Anything with a swagger suited Joe, and he was almost an example for the old soldiers who came next, a dozen or so veterans from the Peninsula and Waterloo, with their eyes as bright as their medals. Then, at last, came the Sunday Schools, and if they were not quite sure what they were celebrating, that troubled nobody. It was a fine summer morning; they had their best clothes and a band, and somewhere ahead was a pie. That was enough.

A ringing click of heels woke the echoes in the churchyard as the 97th were called to a halt by the gate. The band faded into a gasping silence as the magistrates dismounted. William Wood climbed the steps by the porch, from which he had tried,

two days before, to read the Riot Act. There was a bellow of command, hats were pulled off, and then the drums were rolling. Birds went flapping and soaring; the Hussars sat like statues; the infantry presented arms; Captain Cummin drew his sword; and Joe Midgley, who played the cornet in the Old Town Band, did his best to pretend he was a trumpet. Then, in the silence, William Wood was reading his proclamation: '... the high and mighty Prince, Alexandrina Victoria . . . undoubted Queen of this Realm . . .' His high voice carried through the churchyard and over the silent throng, and suddenly, as it died away, the Old Town Band burst deafeningly into the National Anthem.

The procession re-formed. The band squared its shoulders and gave some warning toots. Then off they went again to the market place, where again Wood read his proclamation. Then on they went, drums banging, brass blaring, spectators becoming noisy, to the wide open space that had been known for centuries as Colne Field. Here was a brewery wagon packed with barrels and a cart piled high with pies, and soon everyone was happy. The band, who had been given first go at the beer, wiped their mouths, shook their instruments, and burst into a tapping, lilting tune that was clearly a call to dance. After the stress of recent days all seemed glad enough to take what came. and soon the happy throng was hardly to be recognized as the sullen mob who had been smashing windows and hurling stones. Nicholas had known what he was about, and he had judged to a nicety the amount of beer they should have. They were pleasantly mellowed, but they were not truculent.

Nor had he forgotten a more personal hospitality. His black and red gig was on the field too, with Ellen at the reins and Fanny sitting next to her, and in it was a crate of wine and another of brandy. Soon almost everyone of note had gathered round. Robert, in the close company of Dick Bradley, was there with the rest, summoned by an imperious wave of the hand. Joe Hoyle was there, however he had been summoned. Tom Thornber was there, looking for once almost genial, and even John Phillips was there from Greenfield, as quiet and friendly as ever, talking with Ellen and Fanny. Then at a word from Dick Sagar, the band stopped abruptly in the middle of a dance, and Nicholas mounted the beer wagon. He climbed higher, balancing precariously on a barrel, and his gesture to the crowd was enough. They expected a speech on these occa-

sions, and they came surging forward, hundreds of them together, jocular and good-humoured. For a moment, he stood watching them, looking down on a sea of faces, perhaps estimating their mood.

'Now, lads--' His voice was clear and resonant in the sudden hush. 'I don't want to keep you from your sport, but you know why we're here. Somewhere in London there's a lass who's Queen, and I hope you lifted those mugs to her just now. If you didn't, then just remember to do it next time you have your fists round a mug. And I hope that won't be long.' A burst of cheering came, and he waited patiently, giving time for it before he went on. 'Her name's Queen Victoria, and don't you forget it. There's no folk in this country more loval than we are, and we've come out here today to show it. That's what all this is for. Now that's all, except for one thing. If you're going to drink the Queen's health at nights, you'll need to be in work again. You'll need to pay for your beer. Now all of you know I'm just a spinner. I'm not a putter-out, so this row you're having with your employers doesn't touch me, and I'm not getting mixed up in it. I believe in minding my own business. All the same, it's time you lads were in work again, and some of us have been having a word with your employers about it.' He paused, looking thoughtfully round him as if there could be no sort of hurry, and the hush on the field was strained and urgent now. The faces looked whiter, and a sudden frightened hope could be read in upturned eves. 'We've asked them if they'll help to give the new Queen's reign a start in town. We've asked them if they'll lift your pay, by way of showing that the new reign's better than the last—and they've said they will.'

He had lifted his voice to a shout, for the first and only time. For an instant there was silence, and then a roar of cheers that made nothing of what had gone before. It was deafening now, men shouting themselves hoarse in sheer relief after tension; and before it was over, while still the tension held, he cut them short with his own sharp gesture.

'It's to be fourteen pence the piece, from now on, and every employer has promised it. So you'll all get it, whoever you are and whoever you work for. It starts on Monday. Now—is it worth a cheer?'

It came on the instant, deafening and prolonged; relief, triumph, and hope, all blending into one. This time he waited for them, letting them have vent for their pent-up feelings before he said more. Then he was brief.

'Now, that's all. That's how we start the new reign, and I wish some other town would do it too. It starts on Monday, mind, and so do you. Let's have no hanging back from any man. There won't be any from the employers. They've promised me that. Now then—are you with me? Three cheers for Oueen Victoria! Hip—Hip—

The shriek of the children could be heard above the happy roar of their elders as he led the cheers. Then abruptly he turned, with another gesture, this time to the band, who had been as intent on him as any. His sharp signal recalled them, and as he jumped from the wagon they broke again into the lilting tune they had been playing for the dance. It diverted the crowd, some of them dancing, some of them watching, and more of them talking of what he had said, and it allowed him to return untroubled to the group round the gig. He moved slowly to John Phillips, his brother-in-law, who was in quiet talk with Robert.

'Morning, John.' He sounded brisk and friendly. 'It's a long time since I saw you.'

'I felt I must come this morning. That was an excellent speech of yours. A rise of a penny, is it?'

'Yes.'

'Probably worth it, if it gets them back to work.'

'Well worth it. Especially as I shan't have to pay it.'

'But why not?'

'Because I'm a spinner. I don't pay weavers.'

He gave a satisfied nod as he went wandering off, and Phillips was left staring.

'It's always like that,' he said slowly. 'You never know why that man does anything. What's he like to work for?'

'I've several things to thank him for.'

'I'm glad to hear it. Which reminds me, I've something to thank you for.'

'But what?'

'An excellent suggestion you made. Susan wrote to Anna asking her if she would come to take charge here, while __er___"

'Exactly.' He spoke breathlessly. 'Yes?'

'Anna says she will. She'll come as soon as she's needed, and it's a great relief.'

'I-I quite agree.'

12

THE SCHEMER

Some two weeks later, with July a week old, Nicholas England decided to go to London, merely for a week-end, and for no better reason than that he liked railway trains. His supporters in this enterprise were his elder children, Tom and Susie, who meant to go with him.

It all came about because the Grand Junction Railway, which for the last four years had been a flurry of picks and shovels, now declared itself ready to convey passengers; and Nicholas wanted to see this for himself. The Grand Junction Railway began at Birmingham, and it ran northward past Stafford to a place called Crewe, which nobody had ever heard of, and then to Warrington in Lancashire, and from Warrington to a place called Newton, which again nobody had ever heard of; and here it made its Grand Junction with that pride of the North, the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, which had been working for the last seven years. So one could now go all the way from Manchester to Birmingham by train; and at Birmingham the Grand Junction linked with the London and Birmingham Railway, which had also been in building these last four years. True, there was still a gap of about thirty miles in the middle of it, which had to be covered by coach; but it was now possible, apart from this gap, to ride on the new iron rails all the way from Manchester to London, hauled by the steam of a locomotive engine. Nicholas meant to see this marvel for himself, and to be the first from Colne to do so.

He cast about for an excuse to give his wife, and Susie promptly supplied it. Susie was all agog about the new Queen, and she had even taken to reading the newspapers. From these it appeared that the Queen was to dissolve Parliament and was to drive through London to do so; and why, asked Susie, could not she and Tom go to London to have a sight of the Queen? Nicholas closed with this at once, and he told his wife that it was a part of the children's education. Ellen answered that she would certainly not risk her own life in such a harebrained thing as a railway train, and she did not see why the children should have to take such risks of being run over and boiled alive. But she was outnumbered three to one, and Nicholas went off to write to a banker who was his agent in London and something of a friend besides.

He was in his usual hurry about all this, and he departed with Tom and Susie in the Manchester coach on Friday afternoon. He would be back, he said, next Tuesday, and he left St. Helen's mill in the care of his two clerks and his fettler. The river was back to normal after the recent rains, and the water-wheel was turning steadily in the seething torrent from the pool. The throstles were singing in the upper rooms and Sam Hartley was singing too as he went about his work. Downstairs, in the counting-house, they counted the money to pay the hands on Saturday, and then they returned to their cost-accounts. Then, for a reason best known to himself, Joe Hoyle came to the mill. He came in the middle of Monday afternoon, talked his way past the door-keeper, and suddenly appeared at the counting-house.

'How-de-do?' he said cheerfully. 'Busy today?'

'Quite busy,' said Dick. 'What's brought you here?'

'I thought I'd have a look at you.' Joe flung his hat aside and settled himself comfortably on the edge of the table. 'Nice little place you've got here.'

'As a matter of fact, it's meant as a place for work.'

'Quite right. That's the way to get on.' He walked over to the window and began looking out at the green. 'Have you seen Tom Thornber lately?'

'No.' Dick was beginning to sound terse. 'What's wrong with Thornber?'

'Nothing much.' Joe swung suddenly round to face the room again. 'But I was down there the other day and he was out with

a tape, measuring the ground outside his mill. It set me wondering if he might be thinking of a new weaving shed. But business isn't as good as that, is it?'

'I shouldn't think so, but we don't do weaving here.'

'You're not thinking of starting it?'

'Hadn't you better ask Nick?'

'Ay, aye.' Joe was whistling softly as he turned to look through the window again. 'I suppose if he wanted a shed he could have one?'

'It's his own mill.'

'Aye, but is it his own land? Where does his boundary come?'

'I don't know, so I can't tell you. What do you want to know for, anyway?'

'It's just a matter of business, and you can let it go at that.'

'Certainly I'll let it go at that. Anything more?'

'No, I don't think so.' Joe looked bluff and honest as he took another look round the room. 'Nice little place you've got here.'

'You've said that before.'

'I don't mind saying it again. What's the rest of the mill like? I don't think I've ever seen it.'

'Well, you're not seeing it this afternoon. I can't take folk round without Nick's leave.'

'Helpful, aren't you?'

'Sometimes. Do you mind if I say we're busy?'

'Oh, all right.' Joe sounded amiable enough as he turned to Robert. 'Come and have your tea with us one night, and bring this lad with you. He looks as if a decent tea 'ud do him good.'

The door swung to behind him, and at once Dick was at the window, watching suspiciously to be sure he went. But all was well, and in a moment or two they saw him on the green, walking back to his factory. Then they looked at each other.

'Your brother-in-law, isn't he?' said Dick. 'Can you tell me what he wanted? Do you think it's really about Thornber?'

'I've no idea. And if Thornber is thinking of a weaving shed, we still don't know what it has to do with Joe.'

'Except that he's hatching a scheme of some sort. Well, he can make all the money he likes out of Thornber, but Nick's different. Why did he want to see round our mill?'

'I've no notion.'

'He did want to. We'd better tell Nick about this when he's back.'

He was back next day, and he was telling them about his

journey almost before he had hung up his hat. He had left Manchester at half past six on the Saturday morning, and he had been in London by half past nine that night. He had taken a quiet Sunday; and then, leaving Tom and Susie with his banker friend, he had started for home on Monday morning. Now he was back again, and in three days he had covered four hundred and eighty miles; and he doubted if anyone in Colne had done that before.

It had apparently done him good. He was brimming with energy. He turned at once to the accounts that were ready for him, and he had no sooner approved of them than he was saying he would be off on his travels again tomorrow. He would go to Manchester to see what could be done about selling the yarn, and perhaps to Liverpool too, on the chance of snapping up some cotton at a cheap rate. He took another look at the papers, and remarked that he would take Dick with him. Then Dick mentioned Joe's visit of yesterday, and Nicholas listened with interest.

'Can you see through it?' he asked.

'What about Thornber?' said Dick. 'Do you think he's really putting up a weaving shed?'

'He must be mad if he is. Of course Podgy is more or less

mad, but I don't think he's mad that way.'

'You don't think there's a market for power-loom cloth?'

'Oh, there's a market all right. Anyone who could run powerlooms here would do pretty well. The only trouble is, he'd have his looms smashed next week. Even Podgy knows that.'

'Hoyle was asking about boundaries here.'

'He must know perfectly well that I shouldn't sell land

round my own factory. Joe isn't a fool.'

'No,' said Robert quietly, 'he isn't. That's why I think there must be a purpose in all this. He wanted to look round the mill, too.'

'I don't mind that. It's a perfectly ordinary mill, and we

haven't any secrets.'

'What am I to do if he comes again?'

'Tell him I'm not selling any land to anyone, and he can

keep his breath for his porridge.'

Nicholas went off next morning in the Manchester coach. Dick went with him, and Robert was left at St. Helen's mill, aware of his charge and much elated by it. He liked responsibility and the sense of importance it gave him, and he was

almost hoping that some unexpected trouble would bring him the chance to show what he could do. But no trouble came. The wheel turned, the throstles sang, and the yarn went winding on the cops. There was not a breakdown anywhere, and he even had leisure to think of his own affairs.

On the Friday night he took the walk to Greenfield, where Susan gave him a welcome and asked him to stay for supper. John looked glad to see him, and the two of them went strolling down the garden together in the last warm gold of the setting sun.

'How's Susan? She seems well.'

'I think she is well.'

'All arrangements made?'

'Oh yes. Anna, by the way, seems to be keeping her promise. We've asked her to come here two weeks from today, and she's answered that she will. I must say she's not making difficulties.'

'I shouldn't expect her to.'

'I'm told she can be rather assertive. We had Ellen England here the other day, and she was talking about Anna at Cumberland House last month. She seems to have taken charge pretty firmly. Another detail, by the way, is that Anna, when she was at home at Broughton, used to do some hunting. Think of it! The miller's daughter riding to hounds! She must have had a good notion of herself.'

They were at the bottom of the garden now, and John fell silent for a moment. Then he turned abruptly to another topic.

'How's the town these days?'

'Quiet. What's under the surface I don't know.'

'But the weavers are at work again?'

'Those that have any work.'

'How's Tom Thornber?'

'I haven't seen him.'

'I have. I was round at his house at the beginning of the week, and Tom was looking pleased with himself. But what did surprise me was that he had Hoyle with him.'

'Joe?' It came sharply as the memory revived of land boundaries and a measuring tape. 'What was he doing there?'

'I've no idea. I couldn't very well ask what he'd been talking about.'

'Didn't Thornber say anything?'

'Not about Hoyle. He just talked about his weavers, and he was quite vicious. He said that as soon as it's safe he'll be rid

of the lot of them. He'll turn them off and never pay a halfpenny to a handloom man again. They'll probably starve, and he hopes they will.'

'Does that mean he's going out of weaving?'

'Don't you know Thornber yet? There's money to be made in weaving, and he means to make it, so he'll put power-looms in as soon as it's safe. Of course he'd have another riot if he put them in just now, so what he's doing is to make ready. He has a notion that we may soon have some soldiers in the town permanently, I mean—and that would be his moment.'

'It would be other men's moments too. He isn't the only one

to think of power-looms.'

'No. But the others mightn't be ready, and Thornber means to be. He's getting it all worked out. He's having the plans drawn for his weaving shed, and he's talking of putting another boiler in, and another engine, so that he'll have his power ready. Oh, he's done some thinking all right.'

'But where does Hoyle come into this? He doesn't sell looms

and boilers. That isn't his trade at all.'

'He has a finger in a good many trades.'

'But not in this one, surely? He doesn't fit.'

'Well, he certainly fits somewhere. Ann Thornber was here yesterday, talking to Susan, and it came out that Tom went off to Manchester with him last week.'

'With Hoyle?'

'Yes. They spent two nights at the York hotel, so there's

certainly something.'

Robert was completely baffled now, utterly sure that Joe had a scheme of some sort, and that it included his visit to St. Helen's mill and his questions about the land boundaries. But what it was eluded him completely.

'I don't know,' he said slowly. 'I can't make sense of it.'

'Nor can I. But I'll tell you something else, a detail that may amuse you.' John moved slowly into his walk again, and his tone had become lighter. 'I told you Ellen England was here the other day. Well, she had a word about Tom, too—very much the elder sister. She's taken a notion that it's time Tom was married, and she may be right about that. But who do you think she has in mind for him?'

'I'm not good at guessing.' He spoke steadily, and there was, in fact, no need for him to guess. 'What did she say?'

'She has a notion of matching him with Anna. What do you think of that?'

'Do you think it's likely?'

'Of course I don't, but it's just like Ellen. You know her reputation, I suppose, as the town's chief matchmaker? I'm not sure that she's ever really made a match, but she's certainly tried hard enough, and she'll try hard this time. Being unlikely doesn't put Ellen off.'

'It's an odd sort of hobby.'

'Oh, all women like weddings, you know, and I suppose she's worse than most. That's all.'

'But how does she do it?'

'She picks her pair, and then she tries to throw them together. She invites them for the same evening, and she tries to persuade her friends to invite them, and of course a lot of whispering goes on about leaving them in a corner together. I think it's called tact. But I thought you might like to come to see us a few times while Anna's here, just to learn what's going on. It might be amusing.'

'I certainly will, if I'm not a nuisance. I'd like to—er—keep an eye on this.'

'I shall be glad to see you. As to that little puzzle of Thornber and Hoyle, you might keep an eye open. It's not my affair, but I'd be glad to hear about it.'

Robert had that in mind when he walked home, and as he went up Church Street he saw a chink of light between the curtains of Jane's sitting-room. On a quick impulse he decided to go in. It was scarcely half past nine, not too late for a brief call, and something might be learned. Jane opened the door, and she looked surprised.

'Roaming late, aren't you?' was her greeting. 'But you can come in.'

'I just wanted a word with Joe. He's not in bed yet, I hope?'

'I don't know whether he's in bed or not. He's in Manchester.'

'Manchester?'

He echoed it in sheer surprise, and his first thought was that Joe might still be there with Tom Thornber. Then he remembered that their visit had been last week. So this must be something new.

'Why shouldn't he?' said Jane. 'Now don't stand there gawking. Come in, and let's have the door shut.'

He stepped in, and he was able to speak as if he had no great interest.

'I hadn't heard about it,' he said lightly. 'What does he do

in Manchester?'

'Buying for his shop. He went yesterday, and he'll be back tomorrow. Well, come and sit down.'

He passed a half-hour in talk with Jane, and he hardly remembered what she said. It was ten o'clock when he left her. and high time to be in bed, but he found sleep hard to come to. His thoughts were active now, as he tried to see what Joe's scheme was, and how Nicholas England's land came into it, and Tom Thornber's weaving shed, and two visits to Manchester. He was no nearer to solution when he fell asleep, and he was glad to be down at the mill again in the morning. Paving the hands seemed almost a soothing work, and it kept his mind occupied easily.

He felt very much on his own that afternoon. Throughout the morning the grey cloud had been thickening in the sky. and the rain had begun at dinner time. Now it was a steady downpour that had obviously set in for the day, and it was diding down the window of the counting-house in streaks and rivulets, cutting out the light and making the room look small and dark. It was a wet splashing end to Saturday, and Robert, with no good work to do, was trying to occupy himself with a study of the account books. He sat alone in the little room, turning the pages that were filled with clear neat entries, and he was finding it hard to give his mind to them. Joe and his schemings kept intruding, and then the thought of Anna, who would be at Greenfield in two weeks' time; and colour and vivid light seemed to fill the room, taking his thoughts from the leather-bound book before him. The very pages seemed to merge into the greyness of the afternoon, and suddenly he pushed his chair back and went searching on the shelf for a candle. It might be easier to give his mind to a lighted book.

At half-past three he heard footsteps in the passage outside. There was a tap at the door, loud and confident, and then it

was pushed noisily open as Joe came in.

'Well, well!' he said, as he saw the candle. 'Do you think it's Christmas?'

'It's a wet dark afternoon.'

'It looks like it.' Joe advanced into the room and kicked the

door shut behind him. 'Jane says you were looking for me last night.'

'I thought you were in Manchester.'

'So I was. I've just come back, and I thought I'd better walk down and see you.'

'Good of you.' The thought was with him that something more than goodness would have been needed to bring Joe down here in this soaking downpour. 'But there wasn't much to it, really. I'd just heard that Thornber is thinking of a weaving shed, and I wondered if you knew that—after what you said the other day.'

He was watching Joe carefully, hoping the response might reveal something, and he saw the big face stiffen.

'Of course I know,' Joe said angrily. 'But I didn't think everybody else did. Who told you?'

'Phillips. But does it matter?'

'Not a lot, but I don't want the whole town talking. What about Nick England. Have you told him too?'

'I haven't had a chance to. He's in Manchester.'

'When's he coming back?'

'This afternoon, I believe.'

'Oh, aye.' Joe nodded thoughtfully. Then he unbuttoned his wet coat, and he was flapping water from it as he propped himself against the empty hearth. 'What about letting me see this mill?'

'If you want to.'

'That's a change, isn't it? It's not the way you and Bradley were talking last time.'

'I've had a word with Nick since then. He says he doesn't mind.'

'Oh?' Joe was still leaning placidly against the mantelpiece. 'What else did you tell him?'

'We told him you'd been asking about his boundaries. He said he wasn't selling any land to anybody, and you could keep your breath for your porridge.'

'Of course he won't sell land. What made you think he would?'

'You. You were asking-

'I was asking where his boundary comes, and that's all. I didn't ask if he'd sell land, and I don't want to buy any. You can tell him so when you see him again, just to get things right.'

He sounded quite aggrieved about it, and Robert sat silent

while he tried to make sense of this. It was, he remembered, strictly true. Joe had not mentioned the buying of land; which might be a mere quibble, or might not.

'It would be easier for me,' he said steadily, 'if I knew what

you're up to.'

'Who says I'm up to anything?'

'I do. You're mixed up with Thornber, and his measuring tape and his weaving shed, and you're asking about the land here. Now what is it?'

'You know what they say, don't you? If you don't ask

questions you're told no lies.'

It was a flat rebuff, though the genial tone took the edge off it, and for a moment they were watching each other. Then, and before more could be said, there were footsteps again in the passage; and this time it was Sam Hartley who came pushing into the room. He checked abruptly at the sight of Joe. Then he came briskly to the table.

'We'll have to shut down,' he said firmly. 'It's getting too dark for 'em now, with all this rain. They can't see what they're

doing.'

He gave a satisfied glance at the candle on the table, as if this proved he was right, and then he waited. There was a moment of silence while Robert understood that the decision lay with him. He was supposed to be in charge, and he could not evade it. He must not even seem to evade it, if he was to keep any standing with Sam.

'All right.'

It seemed the only thing to say, but he was glancing quickly at the clock, thankful that this was Saturday, which was a short day. Everything stopped at five on a Saturday, and it was past four o'clock now. The loss of time would be less than an hour and he knew that he would have to accept it. With his inexperience he could not contradict Sam on such a matter. He would have to accept it, and then take the responsibility.

'All right,' he said again. 'Tell Amos to open his sluice. Then

get them all out. You'd better tell me when they're gone.'

'Right,' said Sam. 'It's a pity, but we can't help it.'

'You want better windows in this place,' said Joe suddenly. 'How do you do in winter?'

'Windows is all right,' said Sam. 'It's t'weather.'

He was out of the room before there could be an answer. The door slammed behind him, and Joe puffed out his lips. 'You always find fettlers get above themselves. Well, I'll be off.'

'I thought you wanted to go round the mill?'

'What's the use of going round when I can't even see the

place? I'll come another day when t'rain's stopped.'

He sounded cheerful about it, and there was no sign of disappointment. He heaved himself forward and began to button his coat, and not even another glance through the window seemed to damp his spirits. He turned up his collar, jammed his hat firmly on his head, and then he was gone. A moment later he could be seen through the rain-smeared window, tramping heavily across the green on the way back to his factory. Robert, standing with his face against the glass, felt more baffled than ever. A scheme there certainly was, but perhaps it did not, after all, include a buying of land round St. Helen's mill. Nor, in the end, had Joe shown much eagerness to look round the place, though at the beginning that had seemed to be what he had come for.

The growl and rumble of the shafting died suddenly away as Amos opened the escape sluice, letting the water take a short straight channel to the river. The wheel creaked to a halt, and the silence in the mill was strange and eerie. Voices rang through it, and then footsteps clattering down the stair as the workers made haste to be away, eager for the extra hour that had come to them on Saturday. They went pouring out, collars turned up, clogs splashing muddily in the puddles, and with their going came the silence of a building forlorn and empty. Robert stood listening, hearing the echoing footsteps as Sam and some others made their rounds to see that all was well. Then, with his mind still on what he should say to Nicholas, he locked away the books, blew the candle, and went to wish them good-night as they left. He must himself be the last to leave, now that he was in charge.

He was just back in the counting-house, and was taking his coat from the peg, when he heard steps again in the passage, quick and light. He turned in surprise as Dick Bradley walked in, wet and cheerful.

'We're just back,' he explained. 'Eleven o'clock coach from Manchester, and you should have heard Nick about it.'

'About what?'

'Coaches in the rain. Horses in the mud!' His lean face was crinkling with amusement. 'Rain doesn't stop an engine, you see, and you don't have mud on rails.'

"You've been travelling, have you?"

'We've been to Liverpool, by the railway. Nick pointed out all the beauty spots. That means sidings and junctions and heaps of coal. But you should have heard him when we got to Newton and he saw the other rails coming up from the South. That's the Grand Junction, of course, that he was riding on the other day.'

'Has he done any business?'

'He's sold a lot of yarn in Manchester, and he's bought some cotton in Liverpool. But I think he'd have done the trip without the business, just for a ride on the railway. But how are things here?'

'We're stopped, as you see. Sam said the light was too bad.'

'I expect it was, and I don't think we're the only place to stop. We saw Thornber's men coming up the lane as the coach brought us in, and he doesn't stop till he has to. Any other trouble?'

'Well——' He hesitateed for a moment. 'I've had Hoyle here again.'

'Oh?' It came a little more sharply. 'I met Hoyle just now in

the town. What's he said this time?'

Robert told the tale briefly, and Dick heard it in a careful silence. Then his advice was firm.

'Don't you think you should tell Nick about this? As a matter of fact, he sent me down here to say that if there's anything to report he'd like you to go across to his house tonight and tell him. You certainly ought to tell him that you've had to shut down early. So give him time to have his tea, and then go across. He's handy enough from your lodgings.'

They walked up to the town together in the grey mist of rain, and it was nearing seven o'clock when Robert went to Cumberland House. The parlour-maid evidently remembered who he was, and she took him up the stair to the parlour.

It was a grey dim room tonight, and a fire had been lighted in spite of the summer warmth. Nicholas was by the hearth, in talk with Fanny and his beloved Betsy. Ellen was sitting by the window, making some pretence of sewing, and she had a smile of welcome as he came in. But he hardly saw her, or knew that she was there. At her side, in a chair she had used before, was Anna, cool and elegant. He halted, breathless, and he saw the flicker of an eyebrow.

'Good evening, Mr. Shaw. I'm back again, you see.'

TEXT FROM A PSALM

HER voice was as fragrant and musical as he remembered it, and he stood for the moment speechless, numbed by surprise and delight. He knew that he ought to answer her, that he ought to say some word to Ellen, that he ought to give heed to Nicholas, but for the fleeting instant he could find no words for anyone. His one thought was that she was in the room with him, and it seemed to fill his whole mind.

Then, from the hearth, Nicholas spoke cheerfully.

'Come in. Don't stand in the doorway. I'm glad you've come across.'

The brisk matter-of-fact tone came like a cooling wind blowing the mists away, and he could hear his own sigh of relief as he felt his mind begin to work once more. His face eased into a smile.

'Thanks,' he said quickly. 'I thought I'd better come.'

'Good. Do you remember Anna?'

He did not even feel outraged at that. He was too happy, and he went forward at once to where she waited for him in the window.

'Of course I do,' he said easily.

'I'm glad you've remembered me. It's pleasant to see you again.'

She was all cool friendliness, and again she seemed to take his breath away, leaving him with almost no thought except to savour her presence. Then Ellen rose to her feet, and at once he saw something urgent in her looks. She was almost pulling faces at him, and for the moment he did not guess why. From behind him, he heard Nicholas speak again.

'Get him a drink, Fanny.' It seemed the inevitable command. 'Now, Betsy love, it's time you were in bed. You'll be a sleepy-face in the morning. How about it, Mother?'

'It's more than time,' said Ellen promptly. 'I've been saying so for most of an hour.'

'Blame Anna, then. She's been telling Betsy a story. Now, come along—bed.'

There was a moment or two of chaos, Betsy protesting

noisily, while Anna stayed silent and Robert kept carefully out of the way. Then, as Betsy was finally removed between Nicholas and Ellen, he found Fanny at his side with a glass of the strong sweet port. He took it from her, and turned to Anna again.

'It seems a long time since you were here,' he told her, 'and I hadn't expected you back for another two weeks. It's a sur-

prise to me.'

'To me also.' She sounded very cool and precise, though the note of amusement was there. 'It wasn't even Nick. It was Ellen this time. She wrote to me and invited me to come, and for no reason at all that I could think of. Sheer goodness of heart. Even Nick doesn't seem to have known about it. He was in London.'

'Oh, last week-end?' He spoke hurriedly to conceal the thought that he now knew why Ellen had been pulling faces

at him. 'But did she give no reason?'

'She said I must be tired, after Bingley.' The smile was still with her, and it seemed to be broadening as she spoke. 'She's been telling me I can have a rest for a few days, and a chance to meet people.'

'It's good of her.'

'But Ellen is good. She's always doing something for somebody. I'm not sure that the results are always what she expects, but there's no doubt about her good intentions.'

'Quite so.' He was wondering what guess she would come to next, and he hurriedly tried to change the subject. 'She's been very good with our weavers lately, giving oatmeal out to them. She and the curate——'

The door pushed open and Nicholas came cheerfully into the room, humming to himself as he picked his glass of brandy from the sideboard.

'I've got to go back when she's in bed,' he announced. 'I always have to. Did you find anything to talk about?'

'Of course we did,' said Anna. 'I've been hearing about Ellen, and weavers, and oatmeal.'

'Oh, she's always at it, bless her! Do you mind if I talk business for a moment?'

'Not if you don't ask me to move.'

'Don't be silly. Have you a drink? Fanny, see to that.' He settled himself lazily in a chair as he turned to Robert. 'What's to report?'

'We had to shut down this afternoon at four o'clock.'

'Bad light?'

'Yes. I hope it was the right thing to do?'

'It was probably the only thing to do. In winter, of course, it happens every day. Anything else?'

'I had Hoyle again this afternoon.'

'Who is Hoyle?' asked Anna.

'This chap's brother-in-law, and he's a slippery fish. What did he want?'

'I don't know, really. It looked to start with as if he just wanted to see the mill. Then, when we came to it, he said he didn't want to. But that was after we'd shut down, and it might have been because there was no work going on.'

'Nonsense. Hoyle knows perfectly well how spinning is done. If he wanted to see the mill it was to see the building, not the work. Anything else?'

'Not directly. But I was out at Greenfield last night for a word with Phillips. He'd had a word with Thornber, and a visit

from Ann Thornber. It's rather puzzling.'

He told the whole tale of it, and Nicholas listened with a concentrated attention. So, he noticed, did Anna, who seemed to miss nothing of it; but she left it to Nicholas to make the answer.

'Both to Manchester?' was his comment. 'Looks as if Podgy's on the hook.'

'What hook?'

'Hoyle's. I wonder what it's baited with?'

'It also looks as if Thornber's been measuring for a weaving shed.'

'Don't you believe it. Any millowner knows quite well whether he has room for a weaving shed or not. It's something we all allowed for when we bought our land.'

'Then what was he doing?'

'That's for a guess, and you ought to make your own. But I'll give you a hint, if you like.'

'Please do.'

'When it's a matter of costs or machines, you must stick to the facts. Some men can't get beyond the facts, and they stay as clerks all their lives.'

Robert moved in his chair, as if he had been stung. He had seen the flash of light in the eyes that were meeting his, and he knew that here was a test, a challenge to his quality; and sud-

denly he was aware that Anna was watching him too, still and intent, and as bright-eyed as her brother.

'Yes?' he said softly.

'When it's a matter of people, you don't stick quite so close. You can let your fancy go running—just a little. You can take account of a man's queer notions, even if you think they're mad. That's how you guess what the other chap may be up to.'

'Yes?' His face was impassive, though he knew he had not

yet grasped the full import of this. 'Anything else?'

'No.' The tone changed abruptly. 'Mind you, I will say for Podgy, there's some stuffing in him. He does try to push his business along. Of course he hasn't much above his teeth except bone, so he sometimes shoves in the wrong direction, but he does shove. Now Phillips doesn't. He just sits there, and he doesn't shove at all. Which of 'em would drive you mad first?'

'Podgy, quite easily,' said Anna.

'What do you say, Shaw?'

'I agree. Thornber.'

Then Ellen's voice broke suddenly in. She had quietly opened the door, and she spoke sharply as she came into the room.

'Is it Tom you're speaking of?'

'It is.' Her husband turned cheerfully to her. 'We're saying he works hard at his business.'

'Of course he does, and why he should have all this trouble I don't know. It's been dreadful for him lately, and you don't seem to have any sympathy.' She settled herself in the chair he had pulled round for her, and she sounded quite simple and artless as she went on. 'We shall have to do something for Tom. He needs a little attention, and a change.'

'He's been to Manchester.'

'Well, that isn't a change for him, is it? We must ask him here again. He must come over for tea one day. It will be good for him.'

'Doesn't Ann give him his tea? She must give him pretty

good ones, by the look of him.'

'Don't be so aggravating. He needs to see somebody else. Perhaps we could take him out in the gig one day, for a picnic. I'm sure he'd like it.'

'He has a gig of his own.'

'He never rides in it.'

'Perhaps he doesn't like gigs.'

no longer lived at Greenfield. He was about three minutes walk from the chapel now, and therefore very handy for the Sunday School, which the Inghamites had much at heart. It was a practical institution, meant for a practical need. It taught reading and writing, since to be unable even to read a Bible or write a signature was plainly a handicap in life. So the Sunday School tackled the need, and the Elders were hard put to it for teachers. They searched their flock for helpers; and who could better teach writing than Robert Shaw, who was a clerk, and now lodged so conveniently near? They had quickly told him what his duty was, and it had been arranged that he should start this Sunday morning. It had not occurred to them that the art of writing may be one thing, and the art of teaching it another.

It had not occurred to Robert, either, until he tried it, and he came from it with no great self-esteem. He sat through the subsequent meeting in the chapel feeling surprisingly tired; and then, when he was back in his lodging for dinner and the problem of Joe and his schemings was rising again in his mind, his young brother suddenly walked in: sixteen-year-old Tom, from Trawden.

The explanation proved to be simple. Tom and young Susie, the last of the family, had walked in that morning and had quartered themselves on Jane for dinner. Jane had sent Tom in search of Robert to bid him also for dinner, since it looked like being a family occasion. But there was a little more to it than that.

'What about Mary Ann?' said Tom.

Mary Ann was their other sister, coming between Jane and Susie, and he did not see the drift of this.

'She's fair mad with you. Did you forget Thursday?' 'Oh!'

It was an exclamation of dismay. Thursday had been Mary Ann's birthday, as he had well known, and in the press of events he had wholly forgotten it. Mary Ann had been twenty that day, and she would certainly have expected to hear from him. He did not much like Mary Ann, but he felt sorry for her. She certainly had a tongue in her head, and a way of calling a spade a spade, but she was paying for her own faults. She had quarrelled with too many folk, and now nobody seemed to want her, not even the young men of Trawden. It was perhaps not surprising, but it made it the more necessary that at least

her own family should show that they cared for her; which was precisely what he had failed to do.

'It set Mother asking if you're ill,' said Tom. 'That's why

she sent us in today, me and Susie.'

'I'm not ill at all. But I've been so busy, with one thing and another, that I forgot Mary Ann, and you'll have to tell her so.

Now let's go and see Jane.'

He got as much sympathy from Jane as he might have expected. She was seeing to the dinner, with three unlooked-for guests, on a summer morning, and she was as busy as she was hot. She allowed him into the kitchen, and she told him he was a gawmless numbskull with a head like a sieve, and what did he think he was coming to? She added that she was wasting her time telling him, because it went in at one ear and out at the other, but what did he mean to do about it?

There was never much point in arguing with Jane, especially when she was hot, so he answered only what mattered.

'I'll have to tell her I'm sorry, and then send her a present. She'll expect that.'

'What are you sending?'

'What will she want?'

'If I know Mary Ann, she'll have told Susie what she wants, and you won't find it cheap. You can ask her at dinner.'

Joe was the willing host as he carved for his guests, and Robert took the chance to ask about the present. There was a grin on Susie's young face as she answered.

'She wants a dress length.'

'What's that?'

'It's a length of cloth to make a dress,' said Jane. 'What do you think it is?'

'Velvet,' said Susie.

'What!'

If velvet dresses were not unheard of in Trawden, they were at least rare. He thought they would probably be expensive too.

'Lapis-lazuli,' said Susie.

'What's that?'

'It's a colour.'

'She can't have it,' said Joe. 'She's a sight too fat. She'll look a dam' great pink shrimp in it.'

'It isn't pink,' said Susie. 'It's blue.'

'Then she'll look a ruddy nightmare.'

'That's enough of that talk, Joe.'

'Oh, all right.' He pulled a wry face at Jane's sharp inter-

jection. 'Trouble wi' me is, I'm not appreciated.'

'You won't be, either, till you mend your ways a bit. You'll have to give it her, Robert. If you want to put yourself right with her you'll have to give her what she wants.'

'I don't know how to buy the stuff.'

'You don't think I'm going to let you go buying velvet, do you? I'll buy it for you myself. How will you send it?'

'I shan't.' He answered her slowly, after a brief pause for

thought. 'I think I'd better take it.'

'Oh?' She looked surprised, and then she nodded approvingly. 'I think you may be right. It's a while since you were there.'

'I know. It's time I gave an eye to Mother.'

'All right, then. Now I'll have Joe away on Wednesday. He says he's going to Manchester, so that'll give me a chance to buy the velvet. Come for it on Wednesday night, and bring your money with you. And I hope Mary Ann likes it.'

'So do I.'

The talk drifted to their family affairs, and Robert found himself hard pressed to take his share. That mention of Joe in Manchester had brought the whole problem rushing to his mind again. Joe had been there before, with Tom Thornber. Perhaps Tom would be with him again this time, and what was the purpose of it? That was what mattered. That was what Nicholas expected him to understand; and so did Anna.

It was in his thoughts again as he walked down for the afternoon service in the chapel, and it made no more sense than it had done. What had it to do with Joe? Why these visits to Manchester, and this interest in St. Helen's mill? He tried to wrench his thoughts away as prayer began in the chapel, but it was difficult this afternoon. Joe did not sell boilers, or powerlooms either, so how could he find a profit in this? Then the thought of Anna came again, and the hint she had tried to give him on the stair. He must think of this in terms of men, not of looms and boilers. Nicholas had bought shares in a railway because he liked railways, and if you knew a man's likes you knew the way to his money.

They were at the Psalms now, but his thoughts were not there. It was not easy to think what Joe's likes were. Joe was no simple fellow, to have his likes put into a simple list, and the problem seemed worse, not better, when he tried to think of that. Then he wondered if it was Joe who mattered. It was Tom Thornber's money, so perhaps it was his likings that should be

listed. But what were they?

His mind seemed to split into two, Tom Thornber and the Psalms in crazy antiphon. A down-to-earth cotton man with an eye for money... the works of the Lord are great... obstinate, stupid, truculent... gracious and full of compassion... and suspicious of everybody... ever mindful of his covenant... he probably was honest... hath showed his people the power of his works... and looking forward to a weaving shed... they stand fast for ever... The Psalm was ending now, and there was no more to be said of Tom Thornber. Yet there must be something more.

They came to the sermon, and the senior Elder was to preach. He stood waiting, a short and thickset man with a massive face and jaw; and somehow for a moment, to Robert's confused mind, he looked oddly like Tom Thornber. He could almost believe that it was Tom himself who was standing there to give the text. The words came slowly, from the seventyeighth Psalm: 'In the daytime also he led them with a cloud. and all the night with a light of fire.' They rang through the silent chapel, slow and deliberate; and for the first and last time in his life Robert disturbed a congregation with a gasp of excitement. Heads turned to look, but he hardly saw them, and what the good Elder built upon the text he never knew. His thoughts were leaping now, and even the sight of his surroundings had left him. He was in the Hole i' th' Wall again, where a ring of cotton men were sitting, and Tom Thornber was trying to ride a hobby horse. He was talking of retorts and gasworks, and saying that gas was wonderful; and Joe had been silenced by Nicholas, who had asked how much of the cost would go in tubes and burners. Somebody had said that all the town should be lighted by gas; 'all the night with a light of fire'.

For an instant he was in the chapel again, struggling to grasp the sermon; but he had lost it now, and his thoughts closed in again, as he saw how all this fitted. Thornber was planning a weaving shed, with an engine and boiler to give it power, and Joe had told him he must give it light as well. Looms needed light, and Joe had known what he was saying. Tom had been measuring his land to learn if he had space for a gas plant as well as a weaving shed; which was also why Joe had asked about the boundaries at St. Helen's mill. It

would suit him excellently if Nicholas would install a gas plant too. That would make a pretty charge for pipes and burners; and perhaps other men would have to follow.

He had under-rated Joe, and he would not make that mistake again.

14

A GIG IN TRAWDEN

NICHOLAS arrived at the mill full of zest and zeal on Monday morning, and declared that he was going away again on Friday. He was repeating his London journey to bring home Tom and Susie, who were still with his friend the banker; so in the meantime he would have to be busy, and he demanded the fullest details about production of yarn at the mill while he had been away, with costs of everything. Then he said that they would have more yarn in hand than he had been able to sell in Manchester, and it would have to be sold in Blackburn. He thought Lister & Pilkington would take it if the price was right, but he was too busy to go to Blackburn himself. It was Robert's turn this time, and he could go tomorrow.

'You'd better hire a horse,' he said calmly. 'I suppose you can ride?'

'I was bred on a farm.'

'You're not being asked to drive pigs to Blackburn. Merely

to get yourself there, and then sell some yarn.'

He plunged into the details, and it was at once plain that he had no illusions about Robert's knowledge of the trade. He told him what questions Lister & Pilkington would ask, and what the answers were. He provided him with samples of yarn and notes on each. He told him what prices to ask, and what prices he might in the end accept. Finally, he explained exactly what

quantities were ready, and what further quantities could be

ready in one, two, and three week's time.

'One thing about a factory,' he said, 'is that you can look ahead a bit. I can promise such-and-such for next week, and be pretty sure I'll get it, and that's more than the putters-out can do. They put the work out to these handloom men, and they don't know when it's coming back. Depends whether the chap has a bellyache or not.'

'You're not quite sure, even with a factory. You can be stopped by bad light. You might sooner stop in a weaving

shed.'

'About an hour sooner. You need good light on looms.'

'Isn't that what Thornber's thinking of?'

'Podgy?' The answer came quietly, but there was a sudden keenness in his eyes. 'Now what is he thinking of?'

'First, a weaving shed. Then power for it. Then light for it.' 'Good.' There was a slight pause. 'Did you think of that for yourself, or did you get it from Hoyle?'

'I've had nothing from Hoyle. But I remembered Thornber's

talk about gasworks.'

'He loves' em, doesn't he? That's what was worth remembering.' There was open approval in his voice now. 'What do you suppose the plan is?'

'Thornber's to buy a gas plant. He'll enjoy it, and that's why he'll do it. But it will light his looms, and he hopes it will pay for itself.

'What about Hoyle?'

'He'll supply most of the fittings. He doesn't sell gas plants, though.'

'He doesn't sell 'em, but they're somewhere near his trade, so he'll do the buying, and he'll take a commission for that. What was he doing down here?'

'Making sure that we could be stopped for light. When he found we could, he didn't need to look any further. I suppose he hoped to sell a plant to you next?'

'And then to some other men. The others would have to follow if two of us did it, and it could be quite a big thing for Hoyle.'

'I suppose he was in Manchester finding out about gas plants?'

'And letting Tom look at 'em. That would whet his appetite.

Do you think Hoyle had anything more in mind than what you've said?'

'Not that I know of.'

'Never mind. I did my best to spread the bait for him, and one of these days he'll sniff it.'

'Bait for what?'

'Guess. In the meantime, if he asks if I'll buy a plant, tell him I won't. I can't afford it. I hope you do as well at Blackburn tomorrow.'

So did Robert, but he was at least empowered to deal honestly. The yarn was exactly what he said it was, and the price he was to ask was fair. He had mastered the details, and if Lister & Pilkington wanted to buy this yarn, he thought he should be able to sell it.

So, in the end, he did, but not before he had decided that Lister & Pilkington were a pair of downright rogues. It was his first encounter with cotton men on business, and he had never met anyone like them before. They laughed at the prices he quoted, and then said they knew a dozen mills that would sell cheaper. He answered that that might be true if they waited for a bankrupt's sale, but if they wanted good yarn quickly they would have to pay his price. Then they said his samples were not up to standard. He retorted that this was the best Magnolia cotton, if they knew what that was, and he would like to see the stuff they were weaving now. They looked at each other, and asked him who he thought he was talking to; and he, with the truculence of Trawden rising in him, answered that he was beginning to wonder.

Then it was Lister's turn, and he began to talk about the troubles of the weaving trade. He was lugubrious about the fall in sales. He looked mournful as he said that prices had fallen everywhere this week, and it was impossible to offer the prices of a week ago. He added that he did not know what things were coming to; and Robert, convinced now that these were the most unblushing liars in Lancashire, began packing his bag. He had had enough, and he said so. They had another glance at each other, and suddenly Lister offered him a halfpenny a pound less than he had asked. He stood very still for a moment, while he remembered that he had asked a halfpenny more than he hoped to get. He kept all eagerness out of his face while he said that he would split the difference; and at once Lister agreed, and Pilkington was nodding his assent.

Then he had another surprise. The two men changed completely. With the bargain once struck they were friendly. They told him to come again when he had more to offer. They asked him if he had seen the power-looms working, and when he said he had not, they took him round the mill. Then they took him out to dinner, and showed themselves the best of hosts. Finally, back at the mill while he repacked his bag, they gave him a dozen yards of their own best muslin. It would do as a present for someone, they said, and it would remind him that they were not bad folk in Blackburn.

He carefully related this next morning, and Nicholas laughed

outright.

'Don't worry,' he said cheerfully. 'They weren't trying to bribe you. They're two of the best, those two.'

'It wasn't what I began by thinking.'

'You'll meet worse than those. Anyway, you seem to have done pretty well. It's a farthing a pound more than we hoped for. What'll you do with your muslin?'

'I think I'll take it to my mother.'

Then you'll need time to go to Trawden. I've been telling Dick he can have this afternoon off, so you'd better have tomorrow afternoon.'

That seemed a well-timed offer. It was now Wednesday, the day when Jane had said she would have the lapis-lazuli velvet ready for him, so he called on her that evening. To his surprise he found Joe there, who was supposed to be in Manchester. He said so, and Joe stretched lazily, looking like a big contented cat.

'I found I could do without it,' he said. 'I might go next

week. Or I might not.

It sounded very much as if Joe's schemes were working well, and Robert was alive to that point at once. But for the moment he had to attend to Jane, who was already opening the parcel of velvet for his inspection. He blinked at the colour of it, and again at the price. He said what he thought, and Jane dealt promptly with that.

'If you're giving her velvet you can't have it for less. You shouldn't have forgotten her. Now did you think of taking

Mother anything?'

'I've a length of muslin for her.'

'Who said you were fit to go buying muslin? You'd better let me see it.'

He had brought it with him, foreseeing this, and Jane fingered it carefully while he told her how he had come by it.

'It's grand stuff,' she declared firmly. 'They must be a bit soft in Blackburn, giving you this! What do you think Mother's going to do with it?'

'I thought she'd make a dress.'

'It's enough for two dresses. It'll be one for Mother and one for Mary Ann.'

'Isn't Mary Ann having enough already?'

'A bit more than enough, if you ask me. But that's what'll happen. She'll wheedle it out of Mother. That girl's getting greedy.'

'Then what am I to do?' He stopped short as he saw Jane's unwavering stare, and then enlightenment came to him. 'Of course there's you, Jane, if it's of any use?'

'You're sometimes not as soft as you look. I'll get the

scissors.'

She went bustling off, and Joe took the chance to get a word in.

'Was it Lister and Pilkington?' he asked.

'Yes. Do you know them?'

'I'm not in the trade, but I'm told they're all right. But how did you get on? Did you sell 'em all your stuff?'

'Yes.'

'Your first time out, wasn't it? How about price?'

'I got what I wanted.'

'Aye, but was it what Nick wanted?'

'A shade more, to be exact.'

'The devil it was!'

The door pushed open as Jane came in with the scissors and settled herself to find the middle of the muslin. Joe, after a

wary glance, ignored her.

'Listen,' he said softly. 'What you've to do now is to make them know you for yourself, by your own name, not just as the chap Nick sends. You'll have to get them dealing with you, not the mill you come from. D'ye see?'

'I think so.'

He answered carefully, still disliking what he knew this meant. Joe nodded, as if he were satisfied.

'Of course, that means anyone else you go to, not just Lister. Are you going to any other towns?'

'There's some talk of Liverpool.'

'Buying, is it?' Joe slapped his thigh in satisfaction. 'There are some bargains in Liverpool if you know your way round.'

'Why?'

'Because the Americans ship cotton there for their agents to sell, and sometimes the grower starts shouting for quick cash. Sometimes he'll take almost any price to get it, and that's your bargain. You'd better learn where to find it.'

There was a snip of scissors behind them as Jane divided the muslin. Then she began to pack half of it with the velvet, and Robert decided he might as well put Joe on the defensive.

'How's Thornber?' he asked. 'Have you sold him his gas

plant yet?'

'Now what the heck! What do you know about that?'

'Just what I guessed.'

'Hell!' Joe looked stupefied for a moment, and then he recovered his good humour. 'It comes to something when you start guessing. I didn't think you could.'

'Thanks. But have you sold it to him?'

'Near enough. You haven't told all the town about this, have you?'

'Of course I haven't.'

'Just as well. You have to learn to keep your mouth shut in this town, or some of them'll know your business before you know it yourself. Have you told Nick?'

'He guessed it before I did.'

'What does he say?'

'He says he won't buy a gas plant. Says he can't afford to.'

'Do you think that's true?'

'How should I know?'

'The more you know the better, from now on. But it might be. He did have to borrow a lot of money when he built that mill, so perhaps he can't raise any more. Well, we'll see when I've talked to him.'

'You're going to try him?'

'I'm going to do more than try. There's a lot of money in this.'

Robert met Ellen England in the street next morning, and he stopped for a word with her. But Ellen had a topic of her own, and she started on it at once.

'I'm very much put out, Mr. Shaw. It really is too bad.'

'But what has happened?'

'Nicholas, of course, and his Anna. I try to do my best for

her and help her if I can, and if Tom really does think about her in that way—well, we don't know that he does, but we're told so.'

'Exactly. But what---'

'Well, we must let them see each other, and get to know each other, and I thought Sunday would be the best day. Nicholas will be away, you see. He's going to London.'

'I know.'

'Of course you do. Well, then, I thought Sunday would be best so I asked Tom for tea and to stay the evening. I went all the way down to Vivary Bridge to see him, and nobody could say I wasn't doing my best, and then what do you think Nicholas does? He waits till after he knows that Tom is coming —after, if you please!—and then he tells me that he's taking Anna to London.'

'London!' He felt quick dismay that he would not see her this week-end, and then the satisfying thought came that this persistent matchmaker had been neatly thwarted. 'It's most disappointing.'

'It's aggravating, that's what it is. Do they give no thought to me at all? After all, Anna is my guest this time.'

'But what did she say to this?'

'Oh, she said it would be wonderful, and that's all she could think of. She's busy packing. Do you believe in these railway trains?'

'I'm told they're very useful.'

'Well, I don't believe in them at all. I dare say they are very useful, but not for men and women, and my Sunday's ruined so that she can go gadding about the country behind this boiling lunacy. My morning's ruined, too.'

'But why?'

'Well, I had to do something about Tom. With Nicholas and Anna gone I should have had him all to myself, and that's more than I'm called upon to bear, so of course I had to put him off, and very stupid he was about it. I've put it off till this day week, and then we'll have a picnic. Something might come of it, don't you think?'

'One never knows.'

'One certainly doesn't, if Nicholas is there, with the way he's behaving just now. You don't wonder I feel put out, do you?'

She went indignantly on her way while he went more thoughtfully in search of his own dinner, and he was still thoughtful when he set off along the dusty road to Trawden with the parcel of muslin and velvet under his arm. He did not approve of the outing Ellen had planned for next Thursday. He did not see why Anna should be burdened with Tom Thornber, or Tom privileged with Anna. But it was hard to think of Tom as a man devoted to picnics, and just now he had his head full of other things, notably gas plants. So if it could be filled a little further he might forget this picnic altogether. That could perhaps be achieved through Joe; and he was deep in consideration of this as he crossed the river and took to the steep climb beyond it.

He was at his home a little after two o'clock, and the warmth of his welcome increased sharply when he opened his parcel. His mother was pleased by the muslin, and Mary Ann was so surprised by the velvet that he almost wished he had not bought it. She must have been asking for at least twice what she hoped to get, and he could probably have made his peace with her at half the price. She draped the velvet round her plump person and went stalking round the room to show how well it suited her. Her eyes were shining with delight, and it was plain that she had more than forgiven him. She even made him some tea before they settled him in a chair and began their flood of questions, and with one thing and another it was nearly half-past six when he began his journey back.

He was brooding again on the cost of that velvet as he walked up the steep curving road that would take him to the high upland he must cross. Then, all in an instant, he had something else to think about. Somewhere ahead of him, on the curving road, he heard a crunch of wheels. He was still climbing steeply, and as he went round the curve he almost stopped in surprise. A black and red gig, its panels white with dust, was going slowly up the hill, with the horse straining against the gradient. The gig was empty, but Anna, undoubtedly Anna, was walking with the horse, while Fanny and Betsy were roaming up the hill on their own. For one instant Robert waited. Then he broke into his stride again, more hurriedly, and Anna must have heard him. She turned, and at once the quick tilt of her head showed that she had seen who it was.

'Good evening, Mr. Shaw.' It seemed to be her usual greeting, 'This is a surprise.'

'It is indeed. I didn't know you came driving here.'

'We've been to Wycoller, and Fanny said this was the best

way back. All the same, it's a hill where we get out and walk. Daisy's getting a little hot.'

She was fondling the horse for a moment, and then the gig moved slowly forward again. He fell into step beside her.

'Daisy seems used to hills,' she said, 'and I'm not going to hurry her. Can we take you in to Colne?'

'Is there room for me?'

'Of course there is. Betsy will have to sit on Fanny, and then we shall be quite all right.'

He made no further protest, and at the top of the hill there was another halt while Daisy got her breath back and Anna climbed to the seat. Fanny and Betsy followed her, and Robert had the other end of the seat. The white reins flicked gently, and the horse took to an easy trot across the upland. Anna sat back, her lean face brown in the sun, and asked if he had been far.

'I've been visiting my home,' he said carefully. 'I was born in Trawden.'

'Did you enjoy your visit?' The eyebrows were arching for an instant. 'Of course, we're all supposed to love visiting the family, but families *are* apt to be trying. They don't give you credit for much.'

'Well—er—' He was smiling grimly as he thought of the velvet and Mary Ann. 'In some ways—'

'You evidently know the feeling.' She laughed softly, and she seemed to have her eyes on the reins of the trotting horse. 'As a matter of fact, I'm really out here this afternoon to get away from Ellen. She's what she calls "put out".'

'So I gathered. I met her in the street this morning.'

'What did she say?'

'She didn't approve of railway trains.'

'Now that's putting it gently.' There was a distinct chuckle from Anna now. 'She says I'll get soot on my face and cinders in my hair, and it'll serve me right. There's a little more to it than railway trains, though. Ellen had asked Tom Thornber in on Sunday. On my account, she says, though Heaven knows why. Or rather I do know why.'

'Then why?'

'Perhaps we'd better not go into that. But with one thing and another, I thought I'd be better out of the house for a bit, so I asked for the loan of the gig. So that's how it is, and Ellen's had to put it off till next week. I hear you've solved your riddle.'

'Riddle?'

'What Tom Thornber's up to. Nick was telling me you found the answer'

'Yes.' He stole a quick glance at her, but she was looking at the horse and the road ahead. 'I think I'm in your debt for that. What you said to me on the stair made all the difference. It was the clue to everything.'

'I'm glad it helped, but the thinking was yours. Anyway, I'm very glad. I didn't quite know what it was all about, but I could see that Nick thought it important. Betsy, love, I think

you'll have to walk again. This looks steep.'

They had crossed the high edge now, and before them lay a deep valley where the river flowed, with the town on the rising slope beyond. The road was dropping steeply in a wide curve to the river, and prudence demanded that the load should be taken from the gig. Robert stepped down, with Fanny and Betsy scrambling after him, and then they kept carefully behind the gig while Anna gave her full attention to the reins and the brake. She went slowly and safely down, and at the bottom there was a steep stone bridge across the river. The gig stopped, and now Anna dismounted too.

'No passengers up this one,' she said. 'It isn't fair on Daisy.

We'll probably have to push.'

It was a short straight climb. Anna walked slowly with the horse, and Robert placed himself behind the gig to give a helping push when the horse stumbled. It was an exercise that left him short of breath, but Anna chatted cheerfully.

'I've been hearing about you at Blackburn the other day,'

she said. 'You seem to have had a good day there.'

'I didn't think you'd know about it.'

'I couldn't help knowing about it. Nick was bubbling with your getting an extra farthing out of them. I haven't seen him so pleased for a long time. I thought you'd like to know.'

'Of course I like to know.'

'Then I'll tell you something else. Nick said that if he's any judge you'll end higher in this trade than he will.'

'Nonsense! There's no one like him.'

'Well said!' He heard her soft laugh of pleasure. 'Still, you'll try, I suppose?'

'I can always try.'

'My good wishes to it, when you set up on your own.'
She said no more until they had come to the top of the hill

and entered the fringe of the town. Then there was a moment's rest for Daisy before they all climbed up again and went unhurriedly down the street towards Cumberland House. He was still brooding on what she had said, feeling that he should have made some better answer.

'It's too soon,' he managed to say, 'for me to be thinking of

setting up on my own.'

'Is it?' She answered instantly, but her eyes were on the street now, as they drew nearer to the town. She steered past two unsteady walkers, and then she found time to explain herself. 'Too soon to do it, no doubt. But do you say it's too soon to be thinking?'

'Oh, well---'

'Exactly.' The little laugh came to her again, and then she

was smiling. 'I thought so.'

The white reins tightened gently as she drew the gig to a stop by the lane that led round Cumberland House to the stables behind. He climbed down at once, and he stood looking up at her, bareheaded, smiling, and full of burning happiness.

'Thank you so much,' he said. 'I can't tell you how I've

enjoyed it.'

'Perhaps I have too. I see rather a lot of my family, you know.'

'My good wishes for your travels.'

'Oh, in the railway train?' He saw the remembered tilt of the head again. 'Soot on my face and cinders in my hair? Good night!'

The gig turned into the lane, with Betsy turning on the seat to wave vigorously. He waved back; and then he was standing alone, hardly sure if he were awake or dreaming, but full of an uplifting confidence that he had never known before.

APPROVAL

HE WENT to see Jane that evening, and he had a little more in mind than family affairs. He plunged at once into the family messages and the shopping she was required to do for her mother, and he kept her firmly to the point till he had finished. Then he turned to Joe.

'How's Thornber?'

'I haven't seen him.'

'Did you happen to think that Nick England might be up to something too?'

'What's this?'

Joe sat up suddenly, and Robert began to pick words carefully.

'I don't know what Nick's up to,' he said truthfully. 'But he did say something about putting bait down. Does Thornber visit the Englands at their house?'

'They don't like each other well enough.'

'Well, he's doing it this time.'

'What!'

There was no doubt of Joe's interest now, and Robert watched him with satisfaction.

'Next Thursday, I'm told. What do you make of it?'

'You don't have to guess far, do you?'

'It mightn't be about the gas plant at all.'

'No, it mightn't. And your Mary Ann mightn't have wanted that ruddy velvet. Do you think I'm soft?'

'I don't see what England wants to say to Thornber.'

'No, I don't either, and I wish I did. Anyway, I'll put a spoke in this wheel, and thanks for telling me.' Joe brightened suddenly, and the grin came to his face. 'You're coming on a bit,

aren't you? You're keeping your ears open now.'

There was a long week-end to get through next, when he and Dick Bradley had charge of the mill, and were aware all the time of their responsibility. But all went well. The wheel kept turning, the varn kept winding on the cops, and the paying of the hands on Saturday was done without a hitch. That left Sunday as a day undisturbed, and Robert went at it grimly, too? Nice profit there'll be, won't there, selling coals to the gasworks? What'll they use in a year?'

'I'm afraid that's new to me.'

'Well, don't look so vexed about it. It's all fair business, and Nick knows what he's doing. But don't let's have so much about blessings on the humble poor. Blast the humble poor! This is business.'

'It seemed to be; but it was by no means the plain buying and selling that Robert had supposed business to be. It seemed a pretty battle of wits, and for the moment he felt lost in it, not quite sure which of them had cast the bait and which had swallowed it. But he could think that out afterwards, and at the moment he was concerned with Joe.

'What will you do about Thornber?' he asked. 'Do you still sell him his gas plant? He won't need it when there's a

Company.'

'I wish you'd think a bit quicker. You don't think these chaps will turn up their money just because it's me that's asking 'em, do you? It's no good talking to 'em yet, not till Thornber's running till seven each night and they're shutting down at three. That'll work their money loose. It'll near drive 'em mad.'

'I see.' He was staring at Joe for a moment, almost in reluctant admiration. 'So Thornber's to build a show plant for your use? Is that it?'

'We'll have to have one somewhere.'

'What happens when he finds there's to be a Company, and he doesn't need his plant?'

'I'll tell him he's too far from the works. He can't have pipes taken all that way.'

'Will he believe it?'

'Well, it might be true, for all I know. Anyway, he'll be a winter in front of the rest, and he might get his money back on that. I've just been to see, him, by the way. I'm taking him to Manchester tomorrow.'

'What's this for?'

'It's time he really bought something, before there's talk about a Company. Besides, it'll keep him out of Nick's way for a bit. I don't quite understand that, you know, about inviting him on Thursday. I don't see what it's for. Now you'll keep your mouth shut about this, won't you? I'm not saying a word to anyone till Thornber has his plant running.'

'And when will that be?'

'October or November, I suppose. It'll set folk talking all

right.'

It was to set them talking before then, as Robert was to learn. But for the moment that was all, and the next day there was something else to think about. Nicholas began it by a brief remark that his two clerks had done well for him while he was in London last week-end, and that they might therefore, once again, have each an afternoon off. Dick could have it today, which was Wednesday, and Robert tomorrow. Then there was a sudden change of tone.

'Dick will have to take charge for us tomorrow, if you're having time off. I've to take my wife out in the gig, with Anna

and Tom Thornber.'

'I rather think Thornber's in Manchester. He was to go this morning, with Hoyle.'

'That's new to me.'

'Hoyle mentioned it last night. I suppose it's this gas affair again.'

'Well, I hope you're right. It'll save me a silly afternoon.'

He sounded quite cheerful about it. He went home for his tea, and when he came down again he seemed even more cheerful.

'My wife's put out,' he announced. 'She's been to call on Podgy.'

'Isn't he in Manchester?'

'That's the trouble.' His best sardonic tone was coming now. 'She had the gig out this afternoon, and she and Anna went to Greenfield. Then they went to Vivary Bridge, and Podgy wasn't there. Off with Hoyle this morning, and won't be back till Friday. To make it worse, he hadn't even said anything. He's forgotten this outing. Head full of gasworks, I suppose, and he's forgotten the whole do. Ellen isn't on speaking terms with him now.'

'I expect it will blow over.' Robert spoke carefully, feeling that his position was a little delicate in this. 'In the meantime,

I suppose the outing is off?'

'Oh no, it isn't. Ellen turned pig-headed. She's a Thornber, and they're all pig-headed in that family. She said she'd have the gig, Tom or no Tom, and she wasn't going to be done out of her outing by him. She says she'll go to Broughton, and let Anna see the old home again.'

'Then I hope you all enjoy it.'

'You'd better. You're coming too.'

'It's my wife's notion, so don't blame me. I just happened to let it out that you were having the afternoon off, and she jumped at it at once. Said you'd keep the numbers even, and it was just what she wanted. What she wanted, mind you. Nothing about what you might want. What am I to tell her?'

'I'd very much like to. That is to say, if you and Miss Anna don't----'

'Oh, that's all right. If I've got to go on this dam' fool jaunt at all, I might as well have another man with me. I'll tell her you'll come.'

Robert went home in a dream, hardly able to believe it. He had done his best to contrive that Thornber should be kept from this outing, but he had never thought that he would be invited to take the empty place, and he did not see why Ellen should think so highly of him. He got through the morning's work in some manner that he never well understood, and he was in the stable yard of Cumberland House at the appointed two o'clock. Both the gigs were there, the black and red he had seen before, and a vellow and red that belonged to the Thornbers. Fanny and young Betsy were stowing baskets of plates and provisions into each, with Nicholas keeping a goodhumoured eve on them while he chatted with Tom and Susie. Then the ladies came from the house, and Robert had some minutes of anxious waiting until he learned which gig he was to ride in, and with whom. Ellen settled it to her own liking and with her usual flow of talk. She and her husband would ride in their own gig, and Nicholas might have his Betsv with him. Robert and Anna were to have the Thornber gig, with Fanny, and she hoped they would find it comfortable. Tom and Susie were not being taken this afternoon.

They went crunching and rattling out of the yard, with the ladies driving, and then they were away along the road for Yorkshire. Ellen had the lead, bowling along the white ribbon of road at the horse's own speed, and the dry dust rose behind her wheels in a whirling cloud. Anna carefully dropped back, and allowed a hundred yards between the gigs.

'We needn't drive in that,' she said. 'I prefer not to spend a couple of hours brushing the stuff out of my hat when I get home. Do you like this sort of outing?'

'I'm liking this one very much.'

'I doubt if we could say as much for Nick. Ellen, of course, loves it.'

'And he doesn't?'

'No.' She laughed softly. 'He says the gig is a woman's toy. Of course, if this had been in a railway train, that would have been different, bless him!'

'But how of your London journey? Did you enjoy the ride

on the railway?'

'Most of it. Of course it's very noisy, and when we wanted to speak we had to shout. And every time they saw a cow they stopped the engine steaming and screwed the brake on. Then all the wagons went bumping into the ones in front, and you never heard such a noise, besides being knocked off your seat by the bumps. But it was very comfortable in between, and it's wonderfully fast.'

'That's the great point, of course.'

'Oh yes. Besides—' She broke off, her fingers tightening on the reins as one of the wheels lurched into a rut. 'Being in a gig isn't exactly like being in bed, and this is the turnpike. Wait till we turn off it.'

They had another half-hour before they turned off it, and in the narrow country lane there was no more trotting. Anna kept the horse to a walk, and the thin-wheeled gig clattered and jolted over the ruts of a score of winters. Ahead of them the dust from the other gig was white against the blue of the sky, and every leaf in the hedges was powdered with it. Anna was not talking now. She was giving her whole attention to the horse, but she brought them safely along, and the rest of the afternoon went as Ellen had intended. With Anna and Nicholas conspiring to find the way, they came to a grassy sward by the banks of a rippling stream; and here they eased the horses out of harness while Ellen opened her boxes of food.

It was an hour later, while Ellen and Fanny were packing the plates again and Nicholas was romping with his Betsy, that Anna walked slowly by herself up the bank of the stream. Robert was quickly at her side, and she seemed to make him welcome as he fell into step beside her. But she had nothing to say, and she was looking at the water rather than at him. He watched her intently, thinking that she was oddly silent,

and then he made a guess at the cause of it.

'Did you feel sad,' he asked, 'to see your old house again, with other folk living there?'

'Not particularly.'

It was blunt and firm, and not what he had expected, and he tried again.

'I thought that perhaps old memories might be sad.'

'One can't go through life on memories, and it wasn't our house, you know. It belongs to the manor, as everything does, and my father was tenant there, and my eldest brother after him. But if you think I've a sentiment for passing the rest of my life in Broughton, you're wrong. I haven't.'

'I'm glad to hear it.'

'I had some good times here, mind you, but that's another matter. I'd had enough of the place, and I'm better off where I am.'

'In Colne?'

'Does it surprise you?'

'Well——' He looked round him at the stream, the leafy trees, and the fields of corn beyond. 'I don't think I should call Colne a place of beauty.'

'I'd call it a muck heap myself. But it's alive. It's doing

things. It's doing the new things, and they need doing.'

She sounded oddly in earnest, and it was a tone he had not quite heard from her before. She stopped in her walk, and her eyes met his.

'What things?' he asked.

'All your spinning and weaving, and all you'll do with your power-looms when you get them. Have you heard this called a new age?'

'Yes.'

'Perhaps you have to live in a place like Broughton to know what that means.'

'Or a place like Trawden. But how was it in Broughton?'

'Very pleasant, if you kept to your proper station.' She was standing very still now, by the bank of the stream, and her eyes seemed to take in the whole prospect round her. 'All that you can see here, and a deal more besides, belongs to one family. They own the farms, and they own the corn mill, and they have their hands on everything. I'm saying nothing against them. They were good to all of us, and to me in particular. But it's still true that every man here was born to a station in life, and there was only one way to rise above it.'

'And what was that?'

'Grace and favour.' She paused, and seemed to be in brood-

ing thought. 'When my father died, they were good to us. They let my eldest brother have the mill, which they needn't have done. But when he went to Bingley there were a dozen men who would have liked the mill, and only one could have it. Which was he?'

'I don't know.'

'He was the one who found favour. He may have been the best for the mill, or he may not. I don't know. But he wouldn't have had it if he hadn't found favour. That was the essential, and it still is.'

'I know.'

'What would have happened if Nick had stayed here? They'd probably have let him have the mill, and that's where he'd have been to this day—a little village corn miller. He'd have been quite safe in his station, mind you. They wouldn't have turned him out, and in a bad year they might have remitted his rent. But that's where he'd have been, corn milling for the rest of his life, and with a duty to pull his hat off whenever he saw the Squire. Can you imagine Nick like that?'

'No, I can't.'

'But what else would there have been for him, if there hadn't been a new age opening? That's the point. What could a man do, before there were factories and the new trades?'

'Some men did well in the towns.'

'We've all heard of Dick Whittington, if that's what you mean, but there haven't been many of him. It's only the new trades that have room for new men. There's no grace and favour about those.'

'There certainly isn't, from what I've seen of cotton.' He was smiling grimly now. 'It's one trick after another. Knowing men and knowing the market, and if you fail, they sell you up and forget you. I've heard it called a tricky beast to ride.'

'Which means you need some courage to mount it.' The retort came instantly, and there seemed to be a note of challenge in it. 'That's what I meant about Colne. It's a town for the men with qualities.'

'You approve of it, then?'

'Isn't that what I've been saying all this time?'

'Yes.' He was looking her steadily in the eye now. 'I'm wondering if I have the qualities.'

'So am I.' It flashed back at him at once, sharp and terse, and then her face eased into a smile. 'I think perhaps you

have—though you may have to think a little more about people, as I hinted the other night.'

'I mean to.' He steadied his breath as he tried to say to her what he had never said before. 'If it should come to something,

could you approve of me?'

The smile came back to her, but it was different now. Its meaning was not plain to him. She looked away, thoughtfully down the stream to where the gigs were standing, and the smile was broadening as her eyes came back to him.

'It looks as if they're ready for us,' she said calmly. 'I expect I've been talking too much. I do sometimes.'

16

OTHER MEN'S MONEY

It was some weeks later, in the first week of September, that a tale began to spread of troubles at Vivary Bridge, and Sam Hartley came into the counting-house one Thursday afternoon to tell them what it was. It had begun on the Monday morning, when a gang of men had arrived at Vivary Bridge and had started to mark out a patch of ground. Soon they had been digging foundations for something; and the handloom weavers. who attended there on Mondays and Thursdays to hand in their completed cloth and draw their new supplies of warp and weft, had found it hard to get Tom's attention. He always dealt with them himself, looking at the finished cloth with the hardest of eyes before he would pay for it, and this morning he had been too interested in his diggers. He had kept the weavers waiting; but one of them had made a guess, and the trouble had begun. By Monday night every weaver had been sure that Tom Thornber was putting up a weaving shed. It was to be filled with power-looms, all tented by girls, and there

would be no more work for handloom men. Other masters were thinking of power-looms too, and it would be the work-house for all the weavers.

Sam went on with his tale. There had been mutterings throughout the week, he said, and this morning it had all come to a head. It was Thursday, the day the handloom men went to Vivary Bridge to exchange their work, and more than the usual fifty had gone. Nearly five hundred of them had gathered at the mill this morning, angry and desperate, ripe for any kind of trouble if it would keep their livelihood. The digging for the foundations had been completed and the construction men were beginning to lay stone footings when the angry weavers came swarming over the ground, obliterating the trenches and hurling stones and tools alike into the pond that fed the boilers. Inside the mill the spinners began to cheer in sympathy, while the engine-tenter hurriedly cut off steam and began to draw the fires. Somebody started the whistle; and between that and the shouting and cheering, the cracking of stones and the roar of escaping steam, there had been noise enough, said Sam, to set the dead men jumping in the churchvard. Through the bedlam of it Tom Thornber had walked round the mill, stick in hand, slamming and locking doors and driving his people back to work. Then, when his throstles were humming again and the weavers were trooping away, he had gone stalking up to the town to make his complaint to Harry Bolton and the Justices.

Sam told the tale with relish, evidently thinking it was a good one. He went cheerfully away, and they were still discussing it

when Nicholas came in.

'I'm keeping out of it.' he announced. 'This is Podgy's do.'

'You don't think it's really a weaving shed?'

'Of course I don't. It'll be his gasworks.'

"Then why couldn't he have said so, and stopped the trouble?"

'Podgy's like that. If there's a way of doing anything by knocking his head on it, that's the way he'll take. It's a good thick head, of course.'

Robert saw Joe that evening, and Joe said the same.

'He's like that. If you ask him the time o' day he'll tell you to mind your own dam' business. I think his mother must have dropped him when he was young.'

'Can anything be done to help him?'

'There are some folk you can't help, and he's one of them.

You can help me, though. Come round to Hole i' th' Wall. There'll be quite a few folk there tonight, and it might be the time to say something about a Company. That's where you come in.'

'What are you getting at?'

'Well, I thought you liked this Company. You were talking about blessings on the poor, or something like that.'

'I expect I was. But---'

'Then all you're asked to do is to say so. Say it pretty hard.'

'Can't you say it yourself?'

'Now what's Tom going to think if I start about a Company? Besides, there's the others. If they hear me on about a Company they'll start asking me what I'm up to. It'll come a lot better from you.'

It was difficult to refuse, and nobody in the Hole i' th' Wall looked surprised when he and Joe walked in. The whole circle seemed to be there, including even Nicholas, and it was soon plain that they wished to hear from Joe. His recent doings with Tom Thornber had not escaped notice.

'What have you been up to, Joe?' said one of them promptly. 'Up to?' He was blandly innocent as he overflowed into a narrow chair.'

'You and Tom Thornber. You've been with him enough this last month. What's he setting up?'

'Do you mean his gas retort?'

'Gas?' Voices spoke together, and there was a stir of feet as men sat up. 'What sort of gas?'

'Lighting gas. Are you telling me you didn't know?'

He pulled at his beer with the same innocent look on his face. Then, as the questions hurtled at him, he cupped his hands round his mug and kindly explained the matter. Robert, sitting watchful and silent, noted that Nicholas was giving no sign that he knew anything of this.

'What's it costing him?' said someone.

'How should I know?'

'Didn't you sell it to him?'

'Me?' Joe was in almost pained surprise. 'I don't sell that sort of stuff.'

'Then what have you been doing down there all this month?'

'There's a bit of business, of course. Pipes and taps and that sort of thing, but he's so dam' close you hold your shirt when you'll talking to him, or you'll go home without it.'

'Getting pretty soft, aren't you, Joe?' said Holroyd. 'Spending all that time when you're making nowt?'

T've been learning how to do it. I didn't know much about

gas, till I did this job.'

'Do you think you'll have some more customers?'

'There might be you, for one.'

'Me? If you're thinking that way at this time o' night, Joe, you'd better lay off beer. That's the way it starts, you know.'

'Well, ask me again—about February time, when you're shutting down at three o'clock on a dirty afternoon, and Tom's running till seven, all brightly lit. Then you can talk about laying off beer.'

'Hey, Joe-

'He'll sell you out of every market there is.'

'You're not saying-

'I've heard Tom Thornber called all kinds of a fool, but I've learned now what gas can do, and he's not as soft as we thought he was.'

Joe sat back, looking pleased with himself, and there was an

awkward silence in the room.

'You know,' said Holroyd, 'this isn't funny. It's dam' serious. How much does a gas plant cost?'

'Three hundred odd,' said Nicholas. 'Might be three-fifty.'

'Are you having one, too?'

'I can't afford it.'

'Ah!' Holroyd sounded relieved. 'So it's only Tom chasing what he wants? It won't make all that difference?'

'It'll make a good bit. Another four hours' work on a bad day in winter.'

'Hell!'

'Wait a minute—' Dick Sagar leaned forward now, looking as worried as the others. 'If it's as good as all that, Nick, don't tell me you aren't having one?'

'I can't put three or four hundred down just now. It's too

much.'

'Aye, it's a lot of money.' Sagar stared gloomily at the others. 'Looks as if Tom might be one up on us, though.'

'It's not right,' said Holroyd.

'There's a lot that's not right,' said Lonsdale suddenly. He glared aggressively at Joe, with whom he was not yet on the best of terms. 'Isn't there something wrong with gas? Doesn't it stink when you burn it?'

'Enough to fetch your dinner back. But Tom won't have to sniff it, you know. It's just the spinners.'

Lonsdale subsided. Joe sat beaming, and Robert decided that this was the moment for him to intervene. He was not sorry to have a chance of establishing himself here, and they were worried enough to listen to anyone who could talk sense.

'I don't know much about gas,' he said, 'but I do know something of accounts and so on, and I'm not sure that Thornber's going the right way about this. There might be a cheaper way.'

They turned to him at once, and there was no doubt about

their interest. He chose his words carefully.

There may be a dozen mills that need gas, and I expect some shops would like it, too. It won't be long before the better houses want it. In one way and another there could be a lot of customers for gas, and the cheapest way is a Joint Stock Company, to build a proper gasworks.'

'Joint Stock?' said Lonsdale vaguely.

'You know how it's done? You work out the cost of a gasworks, and then you divide that into shares, and have them taken up by everyone who's interested. It's quite simple.'

'But you have to pay your money just the same.'

'You don't have to pay as much of it. Suppose a gasworks cost three thousand. You might split that into a hundred shares, and then it's only thirty pounds each.'

'You'd not get a hundred men to pay shares in a gasworks.

Do they have to pay for their gas as well?'

'Of course they do. But they get the profits of the Company. They might do very well out of it.'

'Aye, and they might not.'

Again Lonsdale subsided, grumbling and doubtful, and then it was Sagar, of the much more positive mind, who took the matter up.

'What's this about costing three thousand?' he asked. 'Is that something you've been finding out?'

'No. It was just a guess, but I suppose we could find out, if we wanted to.'

'Well, I think we'd better.' Sagar was looking straight at Robert now. 'I'm not saying this isn't a good notion of yours, and you've done right to tell us. But we don't know enough about it yet.'

'I thought it worth mentioning.'

'You thought right.' There was plain approval in the obstinate voice. 'All the same, we'll have to know a bit more.'

There was a murmur of approval that seemed to come from all round the circle, and Sagar listened patiently to it. Then he went on where he had left off.

'We can wait and see, if we don't wait too long, but we might as well be learning. Nick, how about finding out what

these things cost?'

'It's Robert's notion, not mine.' Nicholas turned to him with an air of innocence. 'You started this hare, and you may as well chase it. Find out what it would cost.'

'I'll see what I can do.'

'I don't think much of this,' said Joe suddenly.

'Much of what?' said Sagar.

'Companies. If you have your own plant, you know there'll be some gas in it when you want it, and if there isn't, you take your belt to t' tenter, or your boot. But you can't lay into a Company when there's no gas. It would drive you mad.'

'All that's driving you mad, Joe, is that you want to sell those

fancy taps to the whole lot of us. We know you.'

No doubt they did; but they might still have been surprised at the change that came over Joe when he and Robert were walking down the street together a little later. There was a beaming satisfaction in his face now, and he was taking no pains at all to hide it.

'You did that well,' he was saying. 'A fair treat. I wouldn't

have thought you could.'

'What I told them was true.'

'Aye, I suppose it might be. And there was Nick, too, putting it on you like that. I'd never have thought of that one.'

'I suppose I'll have to do it.'

'Aye, and no mistake. But it's just right for you and me. We're going to do very well out of this. There's a lot of money

in it, if we do it right.'

'Then there's something for you to remember, Joe.' Robert stopped in his walk to give emphasis to his words. 'I'm not helping in this just for sport. If there's a lot of money, then some of it's for me. Understand?'

'Well——' There was a moment of hesitation, and then Joe was hearty again. 'Well, that'll be all right. You stick to me and you won't be sorry.'

'I don't mean to be. That's why I'm speaking about it now,

before I look into the cost of a gasworks. You might remember that the way I put it to them could make all the difference.'

'It's being with Nick England all day. That's what's wrong

with you. You're getting too dam' sharp.'

That was almost Robert's own opinion when he was able to think this over. He had been surprising himself throughout the evening, and his final dealings with Joe had not been premeditated. He had, however, as he soon told himself, merely been business-like, and in this place one had either to be that or be thought a fool. He might now, if he played his hand well, even make some money out of this; which was very heartening, especially if Anna should see it in that light too.

Anna probably would. He had seen more of Anna, these last few weeks, than he had ever hoped to do. She was now in charge of the house and children at Greenfield, and he had come to the habit of walking there once or twice each week, in the cool of the August evenings. To his relief she would give him tea, instead of the wine and brandy that her brother favoured, and both she and John Phillips had seemed willing enough for his company at the end of the day. He had always liked John's quiet and intelligent talk, and now he was finding than Anna could adapt herself to it without difficulty. She showed less of her impish wit when she was with John, but she was plainly able to hold her own in the shrewd discussive talk that he preferred. It was her comments in this sort of talk that now made Robert think she would not disapprove of what he had done in the Hole i' th' Wall.

Nor did she. He went out to Greenfield on Saturday evening, and they immediately asked him about Thursday's trouble at Vivary Bridge. He told them crisply, and the first comment came from John.

'Gas, is it? So that's what Hoyle was doing?'

'Yes. It's new to Hoyle really, but he might work it up into quite a lot.'

'You think other men will want to use these gas lights?'

'I'm sure they will, when they see how Thornber gains in the winter. Anyway, gas is the light of the future. It's a coming thing.'

'What's Nick doing about it?' said Anna. 'Does he mean to buy one too?'

'He says not. But there's some talk about a Company.'
He explained that also, with some discreet omissions; and

then, without any prompting from him, Anna, went direct to

what he had in mind.

'It's all very well, Robert.' She looked him in the eye as she spoke, and he saw the firm set of her face. 'But all these men will be looking after themselves, while they give you the work of finding out about this Company. Are you looking after yourself?'

'I'm beginning to think that way. I've already told Hoyle that

I expect something in return if I'm to help him in this.'

'Ouite right.'

'I don't want to do what isn't honest.'

'You won't. It isn't in your nature, and I'm only asking you to look after yourself. You're expected to, in a town like this. Will you let me know what happens?'

'Of course.'

She had, by that simple request, solved another problem for him. Anna's work at Greenfield was now at an end, and this would be her last week-end here. All had gone as had been hoped. A fifth child had been born to John and Susan, and by next Monday Susan would need no further help. It was a matter, no doubt, for congratulations, and Robert had spoken them sincerely enough, but it meant the end of Anna's visit, and he could hardly be pleased by that. He had said so, and Anna had admitted that she, too, was for once sorry to be leaving. This had given him a hope that she might be willing to exchange a letter or two if some excuse could be found, and this request that he should give her news was most convenient. It provided what he wanted, and before he had even seen that it was there.

'Of course I'll let you know,' he said again. 'But I'm still

sorry that you're going.'

'That can't be helped. But I've enjoyed this visit more than most, and I'll be glad of news. John, will you send me news too?'

'Won't you hear the news from Nicholas?'

'Nick?' The eyebrows quivered for a moment. 'Nick's notion of a letter is about two and a half lines, six weeks late.'

'Then I'll help Robert to keep you informed. I've told you I hope you'll be back here soon.'

'That ought to come from Susan, not you.'

'You know very well that Susan will be glad to see you.'
'Do I?'

She was smiling again now, almost to herself, and she had perhaps some reason to be satisfied. Susan, who at the beginning had had some prickly memories of her youngest sister, had now come to a warmer view of her. She had given all the credit to Anna, saying that her tact and friendliness had been worth even more than her efficiency, and there was no doubt now Anna would be welcome again at Greenfield.

'Then perhaps I'll come some day.' She spoke again suddenly, and to Robert this time. 'But I'll have to go first.'

'Into Yorkshire?'

'Yes. Six unruly children, about to become seven. I don't know where I'll go after that.'

'But how can I write to you if I haven't an address?'

'Ask Nick for it.'

'Would he approve?'

'Why shouldn't he?'

'I just wondered.'

'Robert, if you want the address, ask him for it. Do you know what he'd say if he knew you were shy?'

'No?'

'I don't like to quote it, of course, but you know how he talks. He'd probably call you a damned fool.'

17

WINTER OF DISCONTENT

It was pleasing and encouraging, but it did not alter the fact of Anna's going. She went on the Tuesday, and thereafter, as the weeks slipped by, it became more and more clear that she would not soon return. He had to wait till the early summer to see his Anna again, and he had the cold dark length of winter to go through first.

It was a winter of discontent, and not for him alone. His own discontents, indeed, were small against those of others. They amounted mostly to the absence of Anna and a lack of progress in his other hopes. A lot was in prospect, but none of it was immediate. He went steadily on with his work at the mill, and more and more often he was sent away to sell the finished yarn. Lister and Pilkington became old friends, and soon he had business in a dozen different towns. He even penetrated to Liverpool, in search of cheap cotton, and here he found that it paid to go down to the docks and walk aboard ships at a venture. Any ship in Liverpool might hold cotton, and there was always a chance of a captain with orders to sell cheap for quick cash; or a hard-fisted mate might jerk a thumb to some other ship in the tier, where a captain had a few score bales on private account.

It was interesting, but it did not much affect his days in Colne, where everything seemed to wait. Even the affair of the Gas Company waited, though he had given much of his leisure to amassing the wanted details. He did, indeed, come to terms with Joe about it, saying very plainly that he would not give his evening hours to preparing details unless he could see a share in the profit. Joe was cornered, and in the end he made a firm agreement that when a Gas Company had begun he would pay Robert a hundred pounds out of the profits he would then be making; and Robert promptly went to Nicholas and told him of this. Nicholas laughed and said he should have asked two hundred; and Robert went off to write his letter to Anna.

It was well enough, but it was not immediate. It waited for the Gas Company, and the Company waited until the cotton men had seen what gas could do. Tom Thornber's plant, after much anxious work by him and Joe, was completed by the middle of November, and then, to everyone's amazement, Tom gave a party. He had never given one before, but he did it this time; and at four o'clock of that dull November afternoon he asked all the cotton men of the town to Vivary Bridge, with a few others of note, and all their wives. In the rising dusk, he walked his guests round the retort and the gasholder, proudly explaining everything. Then they were taken on a tour of the mill, where all the work had stopped for want of light, and the spinners were standing awkwardly by the silent throstles. In each room there was the same performance. Joe turned the big brass taps, and Tom ignited the rush of gas

from the burners. The guests coughed as they inhaled the reek of it, and then they were walked round the mill a second time. all work now in progress and the throstles singing happily. Tom was very nearly singing himself as he led next to his house, and here again he had done it well. There was brandy and port and beer, and gallons of tea for the ladies, who mostly said they preferred port. There were sausages and pies and buns, a huge assortment of cakes, dishes of sugared fruit, and an enormous flummery which looked creamy enough to make anvone ill who mixed it with port and sausages. But nothing could deter Tom now, and with his face as red as the November moon he achieved the feat of standing on a chair while he told them how glad he was to see them and how pleased he was that they had all seen his gaslight. It was progress, he declared, and he thought he knew a good thing when it came along. That was why he had put his money into gas, and he wouldn't mind betting that some of them would want to do it too. If so, they all knew Joe Hoyle, and Joe was the chap to show them how. That was all he had to say, and he wished them the very best. They applauded dutifully as Joe helped him off the chair, and then they turned themselves again to his eats and drinks. But thereafter, as Robert noted, a halfdozen of them were seen in talk with Joe; and he thought that a hopeful sign.

But the affair still waited. The cotton men might be impressed, but they were not yet putting their money down, and Joe said there was no reason why they should. If they put their money down now, they would have no gas until about April, which was precisely the time when they could do without it. So they would keep their eyes on Thornber and their money in the three-per-cents; and then, if they thought that Thornber's plant was worth its cost, they might set up a Company about midsummer with a notion of having some gas for the next winter. Or, as Joe darkly added, they might not.

It seemed unanswerable, and as the days went by there were other things that took attention. The Northern Star was found in Waterside, and Dick Bradley spoke gloomily about it one wet December afternoon. The handloom men, he said, were growing desperate from unemployment and their appalling pay. Most of them were sullen, and some were turning savage. They were ripe for any sort of trouble; and into this turmoil had come the Northern Star, which was a weekly newspaper, just

set up at Leeds by one Feargus Ö'Connor, a noisy nuisance of an Irishman. Dick described him as a big, handsome fellow, with a splendid voice and a gift for the flashing phrases that could rouse a frenzy in hungry men. Playing on grievances, said Dick, was O'Connor's special talent. He did not seem to care what nonsense he talked or wrote, as long as it had the effect he wanted, and the Northern Star was the most inflammatory stuff that Dick had ever seen in print. Already it had appeared in Waterside, where the weavers were having it read to them in the beerhouses, and Dick seemed almost as worried by this as the magistrates were. His sympathies were with the working men, but he did not think they would get much help from Feargus O'Connor.

Nor did anyone else. The Northern Star grew more virulent each week, and it cast an added gloom on an already bad December. Robert found it a bad month indeed. All his affairs waited, he had no letter from Anna, and the weather was vile. It was one of the wettest Decembers known, with day after day of westerly winds and driving rain. The river overflowed, most of the green was under water, and getting to the mill at all was a cold and wet adventure. Day after day the throstles stopped at three o'clock as the grev sheets of rain brought dusk before its time, and down at Vivary Bridge Tom Thornber was said to be chuckling happily as his throstles hummed till seven. There could hardly have been a winter in which a gas plant could more certainly earn its cost, and the cotton men were no longer arguing the point. They were merely angry that he should have such an advantage over them. They had even dropped their earlier habit of sending a man down Spring Lane in the middle of each afternoon to report the time when work was stopped at Vivary Bridge. They knew very well it would be seven o'clock and not a minute sooner.

So the winter dragged on, and there was just one incident that Robert thought worth remembering. One windy February morning, with a cold north-easter spattering sleet against the windows, John Phillips arrived unexpectedly at St. Helen's mill and explained that he would like to see the engine and boiler. There was ice in the river at the time, and he had never forgotten the death of his fettler, when greasing the wheel last summer. He had been brooding on the dangers of water-wheels ever since, and this present week, when the floating ice lent

extra hazards, had brought him to the point of inquiry. In the end he would probably have steam.

The ice went out with the month, but the rains continued as the year dragged into a cold wet spring, with brimming ditches and sodden fields. It was as bad a year for farmers as any could remember, and already there was talk that the harvest would need a miracle of summer to save it. The Northern Star seized eagerly on this, as it wrote of the probable price of corn and the hunger that would come to labouring men. Nicholas gloomily agreed, and continued with some trenchant remarks about the corn laws. Even in as bad a year as this, he said, imported corn was kept expensive so that the farmers could charge too much for what they grew at home. He said it acidly. and Dick Bradley disagreed. Certainly, he said, the farmers charged too much for corn, but every penny of it was taken from them in extra rent, and the corn laws were for the benefit of landowners, not farmers. He and Nicholas had a very pretty argument, and Robert thought that Dick had the better of it.

So the time went slowly by, with hunger and discontent for the many, and for Robert a holding up of everything that he wanted. Then, in the last week of April, everything seemed to happen at once. Joe walked into the counting-house one cool

grey morning, and did not waste words.

'This Gas Company,' he announced briefly. 'It's boiling up,

and we'll have to do something.'

That obviously meant Nicholas, and Robert fetched him at once. Then Joe plunged straight into the matter.

'It started one night last week,' he said. 'I was in the Hole having a pint, and Tom Thornber came in. He doesn't often, but he did that time, and I didn't have to wait long to find out why. There was no stopping the chap.'

'What about?'

'Gas. He was just showing off. It's light till seven now, and he's stopped his gas. He'd added up his bills, and he was showing off. There was Holroyd there, and Sagar, and that dam' fool Lonsdale, and a few others, and Tom just drove 'em mad. Of course that's what he'd come for. He was on about his gas plant, and how good it was, and how much it hadn't cost him. He told 'em how much coal he'd used, and what he'd paid his tenter, and by the way he talked you'd think it was about fourpence a week for his gas. Then he was on about the hours he'd worked his mill, and the hours they hadn't worked theirs. He

had it all on a bit of paper, just how many hours everyone's lost bar him, and he had 'em hopping mad. Holroyd spilt his beer, he was that upset.'

'Well, it's all to the good, isn't it? It'll make 'em want gas.' 'That's just what I thought myself. But here's the point. I happened to meet Tom again last night. I was just stepping out for a drink, and there he was in the street. He said he was for the King's Head.'

'Oh?'

Nicholas sounded puzzled. The King's Head had a good repute, but it was not much used by the cotton men. It was more a meeting place for the better-class shopkeepers and tradesmen, and not a likely haunt for Tom Thornber.

'Go on,' said Nicholas. 'What did you do?'

'Asked him what he was up to, of course, and he didn't mind telling me.' Joe spoke more slowly now. 'You know, we've all been talking about the mills wanting gas, but we haven't thought much about shopkeepers. We never thought of them sending down Spring Lane at nights to look at his windows lit up.'

'Hell!' said Nicholas softly. 'Have they?'

'One or two of 'em have, and they've done a bit more than just look at it. They've been asking him about it, and that's why he was meeting 'em in the King's Head. Of course I said I'd go with him, and there must have been twenty or thirty of 'em there, all waiting for him, and you can guess he laid in on good and thick about his gas. He loves it. He had his bits of paper again, all about what it cost him and what it saved him, and all the hours you folk hadn't worked, and by the time he'd finished he had 'em shouting for it.'

'They're not thinking of retorts, are they-one in each back-

yard?'

'Of course they're not. They want a Company, and have gas piped to all of 'em.'

'Well, that's just what we want.'

'Aye, it is, in a way.' Joe sounded very shrewd and thoughtful now. 'It's tricky, though. You cotton men talk as if you run this town, and the shop men don't like it. There's not much love lost between shops and mills, and it might go either way. Your chaps might say they're not mixing with that shop lot, and they'll have their own retorts instead of a Company. They might, you know.'

'Aye.' Nicholas drew his breath thoughtfully. 'You're right. It could happen like that, if some fool says the wrong thing. What do we do?'

It was not a problem that gave much trouble. Nicholas had a meeting with the cotton men the following evening in the Hole i' th' Wall. Robert had his file of notes, and Nicholas opened the matter with his own sharp brevity.

'We haven't talked much about gas,' he said, 'since last year,

but it looks as if we'd better talk about it now.'

'Aye, it does,' said Holroyd, just as briefly. 'We had Tom Thornber on about it the other night, telling how much—'

'He didn't tell you what you didn't know. We all know that Thornber's gas has paid for itself this winter, and that means that we must have some for ourselves next winter. The question is, how? Is it to be a Company, or our own plants? But have you heard that Thornber's been talking in the King's Head?'

He gave them a crisp account of the affair, and the effect was to bring them to attention at once, suspicious and none too pleased. But he kept them firmly to the point.

'So if we have a Company,' he said, 'it looks as if the shop-keepers want to be in it too, and that might be a help. The more money they put in, the less we shall have to put, so whether we have a Company or not depends on whether it's good business, and you asked Robert here to look into it for you. I think you'd better hear what he has to say.'

They were willing enough for that, and they gave keen attention as Robert opened his file. He made very sure of it, and he was able to give them the sort of talk they wanted; short, factual, and to the point. He estimated the total cost as three thousand five hundred pounds, allowing for contingencies, and he gave details of what the money would be spent on. He discussed operating costs, including wages and the cost of the coals for the retorts, and his conclusion, supposing that gas could be sold at ten shillings the thousand cubic feet, was that the company should have a yearly profit of some fifteen per cent on its capital. It could probably be called twelve per cent after allowing for wear and tear, but it still looked a good investment.

'You know it all,' said Sagar, and there was a half-grudging approval in his tone. 'Did someone say the stuff stinks when you burn it?'

'That can be got over. There's a process with wet lime that makes it a lot better. If you don't purify gas it gives headaches.'

'Some folk,' said Holroyd, 'are better when they've headaches. It's the only way you know they've heads. You can knock that bit out.'

'Very well. Is there anything else?'

'I don't think so. Except that if you get fed up with Nick and want another job, you can come to me.'

'And if you think he's trying to have you cheap, you can talk to me instead,' said Sagar. 'There aren't so many now, with heads on 'em.'

'That's enough from both of you,' said Nicholas. 'I'm keep-

ing him.'

Robert sat back, well content. He felt very confident now as he sat listening to the rest of the discussion, and he was alert for a point that he expected someone would raise. Someone, he had thought, would raise the question of a site and its cost, but no one did. Nicholas was carefully unaware of it, and was already turning the talk to what was to be done next.

'Well,' he said crisply. 'I think we'll have to have a meeting with the shopkeepers. Though I suppose the proper thing, really, is to call a public meeting to talk about setting up a Gas

Company.'

'Gas and Coke Company,' said Robert quickly. 'There'll be

coke to sell, as well as gas.'

'Gas and Coke then. If we have a public meeting, I think we should have an attorney there, to keep us on the right road.'

'Bolton,' said Sagar.

'Right. We'll ask him. Anything else?'

'We'll leave it to you. I suppose we can have Shaw there?'

'If I'm wanted.'

Robert answered quickly, but he was noticing again how willing these men were to leave a job to someone else. They were leaving this to Nicholas and himself, and they would both be allowed to do it as a free service; though Nicholas, in fact, would be doing nothing of the sort. He meant to do well out of this, and the others would not blame him if he did. So perhaps they would take the same view of Robert, if he also looked after himself.

The way opened before him the next day. Nicholas sent him to invite Harry Bolton to the proposed meeting, and he there-

fore presented himself at the office in Market Street, saying that he was there on behalf of an influential committee. One of the clerks took his message to the inner room, and in a matter of minutes he was invited to enter. He plunged into the matter at once, and the attorney listened with full attention. Then he pursed his lips and nodded sagely.

'Most interesting,' was his comment. 'It's an ambitious scheme, though, and it will be wise to go carefully.'

'That's why you are asked to attend this meeting.'

'In what capacity am I asked to attend? As a private citizen, or professionally?'

'Both, I should say. But certainly professionally. They've understood that some guidance will be needed. There will be the buying of land, and the laying of pipes through streets—'

'And the Articles of Agreement, if you please. They need

careful drafting.'

'Exactly. But one can't foresee how a public meeting will go,

and some guidance may be needed there also.'

'Nothing more likely, from what I know of public meetings.' Bolton paused and was again looking very straightly across the desk. 'This, of course, involves professional charges. Have your people considered that?'

'No, they haven't, yet.'

'It's my usual experience that they don't. You'll not object, I hope, that I mention it at the outset.'

'I don't object in the least.' His gaze was as steady as the attorney's. 'The fact is, Mr. Bolton, that I'm in the same dilemma myself. I'm apparently to act as both clerk and financial adviser to this committee, and I've put in a great many hours of work already. So far, there isn't any word of paying me a fee. Of course they may think of it later.'

'They won't if their memory isn't jogged.'

'That's what I'm afraid of. So I hope you'll tell them. It will come better from you than from me.'

'I shall most certainly tell them. And if I may give you a word of advice, young man, don't in future do any work for anyone without some clear understanding about payment. It isn't wise.'

'So I'm learning. Now how of the date for this meeting?'

They fixed the meeting for the 12 May, and Robert, well pleased with himself, went off to report to Nicholas, and to ask for Anna's latest address. He thought he had news for her.

RECOGNITION

Anna wrote back from Leeds. She seemed pleased that he should have a part in this forming of a Gas Company, and she wished him success in it. Then she became practical. When she had been at Cumberland House last summer, she said, she had found that water was piped to the house and she did not have to depend on a well. She had been sufficiently surprised to ask about it, and she had learned that a Company to sell water out of pipes had been there for twenty years; and if for water, why not for gas? Was anybody pointing this out?

Nobody was. Nobody but Anna had even thought of it, and Robert wrote back at once to tell her so. Then he went off to make further inquiries into this Water Company, and what

its profits were. This looked like a useful point.

Anna wrote again. There was a chance, she now said, that she might be in Colne again before very long. She had had a letter of invitation from Ellen, though whether she could accept she did not yet know. She had only just arrived at Leeds, and would be there for some weeks, so it was too soon to be sure

of anything.

That set him into a pleased excitement. But why this invitation from Ellen? It could hardly be her old plan of matchmaking with Tom Thornber, for she was still hardly on civil terms with him after his forgetting of her picnic. But a day or two later he heard something from Tom England that seemed to throw a possible light on it. Tom and Susie, it appeared, were trying to persuade their father into another trip to London. He had taken them last July, that they might see the Oueen drive through the streets, and now they were hoping that he would do it again for a greater occasion. The Queen was to be crowned next month and Susie was trying every blandishment she and Tom could think of between them. Nicholas had not promised it yet, but, neither had he refused, and Susie thought she could wear him down. But Anna had been to London with Nicholas last July and it might, possibly, be his intention to take her again; and if that were in his mind, he might have prompted Ellen to invite her to Colne.

On the day fixed for the public meeting about the Gas Company Nicholas came breezing into the counting-house and slapped a folded newspaper on Dick Bradley's desk. He pointed to a three-column article and demanded that Dick should tell him what it meant. Dick began to look at it, and Robert moved behind him to read it over his shoulder.

It was about something that called itself the London Working Men's Association, which seemed to be concerned to make a further reform of Parliament and the system of elections. The Association had gone to the length of writing a completely new Reform Bill, and had just published it under the flamboyant name of The People's Charter, presumably in the hope of rousing the people's feelings. Two tightly packed columns in the newspaper gave six heads under which this Charter was arranged, and the first of them was that every man in the country should be allowed a vote.

'Every Jack Weaver,' commented Nicholas. 'He may be halfwitted, and all he can do is to drink and spit, but he's to have a vote. Is that it?'

'That's it exactly.' Dick sounded quite unruffled. 'Next, vot-

ing is to be by secret ballot.'

'Which is to say a man's not to account for what he does with his vote. He can swear he'll vote for one man, and then he can take ten pounds to vote for the other.'

'For that matter, he can take the ten pounds and not vote

for the other.'

'So he can. I thought you believed in all this Radical stuff?'

'Not all of it. But if I was trying to corrupt an election, I mightn't be so quick to give ten pounds to a man if I couldn't see him vote.'

'Well, there's something in that. What comes next?'

'Point three. It's about having constituencies all the same size.'

'That's the one bit that has some sense. It might put the landowners in their proper places. At the moment they elect three-quarters of a Parliament.'

'Which is why they keep corn dear. Head four—'—Dick had turned to the paper again—'Parliament to be elected every year. That's so it can't get out of date. I suppose. Point five, no qualifications of house or land needed for voting.'

'He doesn't pay any rent and he doesn't pay any rates, but he can still vote! Is this Bedlam, or a civilized country?' 'We're something between the two. Head six-Members of

Parliament to be paid for their work.'

'Well, that's nothing between the two in that. It's just plain Bedlam. Do you think we're going to have trouble with this dam' fool Charter?'

'Well, I think Jack Weaver's going to like it. So will a lot of other folk. They might gain by it, and they can't lose, and

it'll make them feel important.'

'You're in a happy mood this morning, aren't you?' Nicholas nodded, and then his tone changed as he turned quickly on Robert. 'Are you all ready for tonight?'

'I think so.'

'You've arranged with Bolton?'

'Yes. He'll be there.'

'How about Hoyle?'

'He'll be there too, but he isn't going to speak unless he has to.'

'Quite right. What's Podgy saying? He's not in love with a Company, I suppose, now he's bought his own plant?'

'Oh yes, he is. He likes gas so much that he wants the whole town lit up.'

'That's all right. Half past seven, isn't it?'

'At the Angel. Joe said there was more room there.'

Nicholas had signed the notice that convened the meeting, and this allowed him to take the chair. He did it at precisely half past seven, with Robert sitting at his right hand at the side of the table, and his introduction was commendably brief. There were, he said, two questions before them: whether a gas plant was worth having; and if so, whether private plants would suit them best, or a Company for the whole town. It would be better to keep the questions separate; and on the first one he thought he could not do better than ask Tom Thornber to say a word to them. Would Mr. Thornber like to speak?

Tom would talk about his gas plant to anyone, and in the next twenty minutes he swayed the meeting. It was not what he said that counted, but his way of saying it. He was so pleased with it. Everything about gas was good and nothing could be bad, and this bubbling enthusiasm was infectious. It spread itself through the room and Tom sat down to a roar of applause. Then Nicholas turned to figures. He gave the exact number of hours his mill had lost through lack of light, and

some careful estimates of the loss in trade. Dick Sagar folowed with some similar figures from his own mill. Then William Bottomley got up. He had a shop in Church Street, and he seemed to be speaking for all the shopkeepers. Every winter, he said, they had either to shut their shops some five hours sooner than they wished to, or struggle on with a light so bad that they could see neither their goods nor their money properly. He told them what he had lost last winter by bad coins foisted on him in the lamp-light, and he had hearty applause when he said they wanted a decent light and there needn't be any talk about private gas plants. Did anyone think that shops could make gas in their own back yards? The town wasn't run just for the mill men even if they thought it was, and he wanted a proper gasworks that would sell to everyone. He had thunderous applause as he sat down.

Very well, said Nicholas. Everybody wanted gas, and the question now was whether it should be a Company or not. This was not as easy as some of them might think, and they would have to watch that they were on the right side of the law. He was glad to see his old friend Harry Bolton in the room tonight. Would someone like to propose that he be appointed their legal adviser?

That was soon done and Nicholas quickly had Bolton sitting at the table with himself and Robert. Then he went on in the same crisp tone.

'Mr. Bolton is now adviser to the meeting. Now what we need to know is how much it'll cost to set up a plant big enough to give gas to all of us. And when we know how much money we've to put down, we'll want to know what we're going to get back. That's to say, what kind of profits the Company is likely to make. Some of us were asking those questions quite a while ago, and we knew they'd have to be looked into properly. So we gave that job to Robert Shaw here, and now you can listen to the report he's going to make to you.'

Robert paused for a moment, head bent over the table while he gathered his papers, and in that moment he was forestalled. Bolton had risen instead, and already he was speaking.

'A point rises here that I must call attention to. It's best to mention these things at the proper time. How do you propose to pay the charges of this report?'

'What charges?' asked Nicholas tersely.

'A fee to Mr. Shaw for preparing the report.'

'I didn't think he was after a fee.'

'I shall advise him to require one. I'll estimate the amount

of it myself and I shall advise you to pay it.'

'All right then. Is that agreed?' Nicholas flung the question at a meeting that was growing restive. 'Fee for Shaw, then.

Now, come on. Earn your money.'

It was Robert's turn at last and he did not hurry it. He had put some hard work into this, and he had covered the subject thoroughly. He knew that his report was good, so he expounded it carefully, giving the facts in detail and making sure they were understood before he passed to opinions. He spoke slowly and clearly, his confidence growing as he noted the utter silence in the room. They were all listening intently, and that was proof enough of their attention.

The silence held when he sat down. There was a stir of feet and a buzz of interest, but that was all, and Nicholas turned

with a quick nod of approval.

'Questions?' he said briefly.
'Is the dam' stuff safe?' said Holrovd.

'Perfectly safe. Of course, if you get a fool he can burn himself.'

'What if he blows himself up?'

'Somebody buries him. Any more questions?'

'What's this about the stuff stinking?'

'Gas gives off fumes,' said Robert, who was well prepared for this. 'It's bound to, when you burn it, and if a man works for long enough in a room that's lit by gas, he gets a headache.'

'What when he goes home?'

'He gets over it.'

'That's fine, then. Stink don't matter.'

'Hey, wait a bit,' said Bottomley, who had jumped to his feet and was beginning to look indignant. 'It's all right for you in the mills, but what about us in shops? We have to please our customers, and headaches won't please 'em much.'

'It can be dealt with,' said Robert. 'There's a way of clean-

ing gas with lime, and it makes it all right.'

'What does it cost?' said another.

'I've put it at three hundred and fifty pounds.'

'We're not spending all that,' said Holroyd, 'just to stop a chap from coughing when he buys a bit of bacon. It's dam' silly.'

'Dam' silly yourself,' said Bottomley. 'We're not spending money just to drive customers out of our shops.'

Then Dick Sagar intervened, and he did his best to divert

their attention.

'What I'd like to know,' he said, 'is where we're going to build this gasworks. What's the best place for it?'

Nicholas was on his feet at once. There was one darting glance at Robert, to convey a warning, and then he was good humoured and half-amused.

'You know all this stuff about whether we use lime isn't what we should be talking about. You want a committee for that, not a public meeting, and we're going to be here all night if we don't get back to the right business.' He nodded assent as a murmur of approval rose. 'What we should do is to decide whether we want a Company or not. If we don't, let's go home. If we do let's say so, and then appoint a committee. We can leave them to the details.'

There was no doubt of the approval now. The murmur of voices filled the whole room, and he was not the man to waste his chance. In another five minutes he had it agreed that a Gas Light and Coke Company should be formed, the "Light" being inserted by Bolton, who said it would be a help if the company should ever be asked to light the streets. Five more minutes produced agreement that the Company should be divided into one hundred and fifty shares, each of twenty pounds; and then he asked for offers to buy them. Robert repeated that a profit of twelve per cent might reasonably be expected, and this brought an offer or two. Then somebody asked how they could be sure that enough folk would buy the gas. It wasn't like something you could have a look at before you bought it; it was something that came out of a pipe, and he wasn't sure that folk would pay their money down for that. He spoke gloomily and a man at the back was heard to ask if you could really run pipes in the street like that, and a separate one to every customer.

It looked like check. The room was filled with doubt. Men were shaking their heads, and somebody said it would be better to wait and see. There were no more offers to buy shares. The moment was critical, and Nicholas was stiffly on his feet, watching for his chance.

Then Robert played the last card, the one Anna had given him. He rapped on the table for silence, utterly ignoring Nicholas. Had they forgotten the Water Company? His question came suddenly, and it brought looks of surprise to their faces. Then he pressed his point firmly. The Water Company sold stuff that came from pipes, and it ran a pipe to every customer. For a long moment he waited; and then he told them what profits the Water Company had been making these

last ten years.

That clinched it. The doubt was swept away, and John Midgley, who sold hats, jumped up to say he would buy a share. John Whitaker, who kept the Robin Hood, said he would buy five shares, and then the rush began, with Robert's pen scratching fast as he noted the names and offers. In five minutes it was done, and enough shares had been spoken for to make it sure that the rest would be sold without much trouble. Then a committee was appointed, with Nicholas as chairman, and everybody looked satisfied. They went trooping out, and one after another of them turned to the table for a word to Robert about the report. Nicholas looking tired but happy, had sunk into his chair again with his legs stretched lazily, and even Harry Bolton looked pleased.

'Excellent,' he said briefly to Robert. 'That was an admirable report you presented. I shall estimate your fee as forty

guineas. What do you say, England?'

'Call it twenty-five,' said Nicholas calmly. 'And another

twenty-five for that stuff about the Water Company.'

'Well—er—' Bolton pursed his lips for a moment. 'You're the chairman, of course. And I admit the piece about the Water Company was useful.'

'It tipped the scale.'

'Very well, then. Fifty guineas. I'll put it before the committee. Good night, gentlemen, good night. I look forward to

working with both of you.'

He went bustling off, and it seemed for a moment that Robert and Nicholas were alone. Then they saw that Joe was still in the room. He had been in his corner at the back throughout it all, hardly moving and never speaking, and now he came slowly forward.

'Grand,' was his short comment. 'That bit about the Water

Company was just the thing.'

'It's ten guineas extra on his fee,' said Nicholas.

'Fifty if you ask me. But anyway, what is this about a fee? Did he put Bolton up to that?'

'It's all right. He's waking up a bit sooner than I thought he would. That's all.'

There was something like a chuckle from Joe, who looked so pleased that he seemed even to overlook his private promise of a fee to Robert. He clapped his hat on the back of his head and chuckled yet again.

'Aye, it was grand,' he said. 'Water Company! Don't know how you thought of it. Well, I'll be off. See you tomorrow!'

He went genially out. Nicholas yawned, and then got lazily to his feet.

'Come and have a drink,' he said abruptly. 'You've earned it.'

'Thanks. As a matter of fact, I didn't think of that water business for myself. It was Anna.'

He explained it quickly, and Nicholas stood in rapt attention, with surprise showing in his face, and then a glowing pleasure.

'What a lass!' he said happily. 'Why couldn't she have been a man? She's certainly wasted as a woman.'

'She certainly isn't.'

It rang sharply; and Nicholas stood very still and quiet. His eyes seemed to widen for a moment, and then a light came into them that was almost Anna's.

'Well, I'm damned!' he said softly. 'It's that way, is it?'

19

THE RETURN

THAT was disconcerting, and Robert blamed himself for being so incautious. He might have known that Nicholas was capable of these flashes of understanding, but Nicholas made no further comment. He had something else to think about. Joe Hoyle,

who had kept so quiet at the meeting, was soon busy. He knew very well that a trade in taps and burners would not come while the Company was mere talk. The orders would not come until men could see the gasworks actually going up. So Joe was busy, whispering, suggesting, dropping dark hints, and he worked up feelings that the committee could not ignore. So they began to hold meetings, and almost their first discovery was what Joe had known from the outset, that far and away the best site for the works was by the green, just below St. Helen's mill, and was owned, as it happened, by Nicholas England.

Nicholas looked surprised. He said he had no wish to sell any land at all. It was land he was holding for his own use. He would try to be accommodating, but he thought that until the matter was settled he had better not act as chairman of the committee that was trying to buy this land. He thought that the chair should be taken by whoever, after himself, had had the most votes when the committee was elected. So the committee counted votes: and discovered that the new chairman would be Tom Thornber, whose care with money did not extend to other people's, and who was more impatient than anybody else to get the land bought and the works begun.

After that, of course, the end could be guessed. Nicholas accepted two hundred pounds for the land, which was perhaps ten times what he had paid for it, and when Harry Bolton said that the committee did not yet command two hundred pounds with which to buy anybody's land, Nicholas answered that he would accept shares in the company. Dick Bradley remarked that this seemed a pretty good way of getting shares for nothing, or very nearly nothing. Joe said that Nicholas had been quietly buying a larger interest in the colliery across the river. which might be expected to supply coal to the gasworks. Robert said nothing at all; but he was learning.

Then, as May slipped into June, Nicholas had to decide whether he would take his children to London or not, and it soon turned out that Robert's guess had been right. Nicholas was willing to take them if he could take Anna too. But Anna was in charge of a house and some children at Leeds, and she could not decently leave until her sister there was fit enough. As the Coronation was in three weeks' time, this seemed doubtful. She would do her best, but she thought that Nicholas had

better make plans for a journey without her.

Thus wrote Anna, and Nicholas grumbled about sisters who had no more sense than to land themselves in bed at a time like this. He added that Susie had developed a trick of bursting into tears whenever he said that nothing was yet fixed, and he thought it would be less trouble to take her to London than to have her yowling at the breakfast table each morning. So he arranged that they should leave on the 25th, which would be the Monday before the Coronation, and unless Anna could be free in time he would have only Tom and Susie with him. Ellen was maintaining firmly that she would have no dealings with such unnatural things as railway trains.

Nicholas, in the meantime, took his place as chairman of the Gas Company committee, and soon they were deep in the detailed work of ordering equipment and arranging for its erection. They were working largely from Robert's notes, and once or twice he was called upon to explain a point or two, but in general he was now out of it. He thought he had enough to do at St. Helen's mill. So the committee looked for someone else. They sifted through a mob of hungry applicants and picked on Joe Earnshaw, who wrote a decent hand and was believed to be honest, though perhaps his main virtue was that he could be had cheap. He was certainly very willing.

Anna did not return in time for the trip to London, and Nicholas went off with Tom and Susie. Dick Bradley was in Manchester, trying to sell yarn, and Robert was left by himself. Everyone seemed to be busy, and Joe Hoyle was busier than anyone. The news was out that the building of the gasworks would begin at any moment, and no other ironmonger in the town had the facilities of Joe's factory or his experience in fitting out Tom Thornber's plant. So the inquiries came to Joe, and he was busy from morning till night, visiting shops and workrooms, making sketches of installations and estimates of costs. In addition he was fitting out his own shop and factory, and with one thing and another Jane saw very little of her Joe. Robert saw nothing of him at all, and it made life very quiet.

Yet this should have been a bustling week, for Thursday was Coronation day, and some sort of celebration was plainly called for. The trouble was that there had been some second thoughts about last year's goings-on, particularly about the beer that Nicholas had provided for the weavers. A notion had been gaining ground that beer and Sunday schools did not go well together. Some folk maintained that to give beer to weavers

was to tempt them to what they could not afford, and was bad for them anyway. The Inghamites put it forcibly. They could not, they said, pray on Sunday to be led not into temptation. and then busy themselves during the week in leading others into temptation. Other chapels were at least inclining that way. and even the curate at the Parish Church had been heard to speak earnestly of the effects that beer could have on weavers. It was therefore plain to the organizing committee that they could not have the Sunday schools in this year's procession unless they were kept at a safe distance from any beer that might be provided. The cotton men, who were expected to pay for the beer, now refused to do so, and the spinners and weavers, who regarded beer as their right in all celebrations, promptly said that they would have nothing to do with this one. The committee, seeing plainly that the affair could now last only a couple of hours, then announced that pies for the Sunday schools would be out of place at five o'clock, and it would be tea and buns instead, with no beer for anyone. The children, who thought buns a poor substitute for the large beefsteak pies of the Nicholas era, at once turned sulky asking their mothers if they must walk at all: and the Superintendents. whose qualms had started all this, had to pacify them as best they could with promises of sugar-icing on the buns.

So the celebration, when it came, was a half-hearted affair after what Nicholas had done the year before. Still, there was a procession, led once more by the Old Town Band, and the Sunday schools duly walked. Robert, who was still giving lessons to them on Sunday morning, thought he ought to put in an appearance, and he was therefore on Colne Field when the procession ended and the tea and buns began. Then he saw at the side of the field the black and red gig that must surely mean Ellen England. A group of cotton men were there with their wives, and he decided to go across for a word with her; but as soon as he came to the group he was hailed by John Phillips, who had Susan with him.

'We've been wondering when we should see you again,' said John. You're becoming a stranger.'

'I've been busy.'

'You seem to have been making a name for yourself with this Gas Company. But can you come to see us tomorrow? There are one or two points I want to talk about.'

'Besides,' said Susan, 'we want to hear your news. You'd

better come for supper.'

'Very well, then, tomorrow evening. But—' He had just seen that the black and red gig was moving, and that Ellen was in it. 'I wanted a word with Mrs. England.'

'Then you'd better hurry.'

He went quickly across, as Ellen walked the horse round the edge of the group. She checked the horse at once.

'Good afternoon!' She sounded quite pleased to see him.

'Let me take you home. There's plenty of room."

It was unexpected, but he was pleased to find her friendly. He climbed quickly to the seat, Fanny moving closer to her mother, and then Ellen was chattering in her usual style as she guided the horse slowly across the crowded field.

'I can't stay any longer. Betsy will have to come up with the curate. She's eating sugared buns over there, but I can't wait any longer for her. Did you know Anna's coming? I had a letter this morning, and it took four days to come from Leeds, and I'm sure two days is enough. So now, of course, it's short notice. Do you wonder I feel put out?'

'But what does she say?'

'She's finished there, and she's coming at once, and she'll be here on Friday.'

'Tomorrow?'

'Yes, and I only had the letter this morning, so it's short notice. I'm not ready for her yet, and that's why I can't stay on this field waiting for Betsy. I must make ready for Anna.'

'I hope she has a good journey.'

'I don't see why she shouldn't. She'll have to get up early, of course, but she's young enough.'

'I expect she'll manage.'

'Why shouldn't she manage? When I was her age I used to enjoy a coach in the early morning. She can have a hot-water bottle, and I don't know what girls are coming to when they can't take a journey in a coach. It's only forty miles, and a great deal more proper than a railway train, let me tell you.'

She sounded truculent about it as the gig moved out of the field and came to the metalled road. Then she turned suddenly

to him.

'You will come in and see us, won't you, while Anna's here?' 'Certainly I will. It's most kind of you.'

'Oh no, it isn't.' There was a distinct ring of the Thornber

now. 'I like Anna, but you know how it is with guests, and I don't care who they are. After a week you've said everything you can think of, and you're glad if someone will come in and talk. It gives you a little peace.'

'Of course I shall be only too glad---'

'Besides, you know how she spends her time, always staying with a sister and looking after children. It's too many women together, and it's not good for her. Anyway, the sister's usually in bed, and that means Anna's in charge, which isn't good for her either. It makes her opinionated. So come and talk to her, Mr. Shaw, and don't let her have all her own way.'

'Very well, I'll---'

'She will, you know, if you let her. She's nearly as bad as Nicholas. What do you think of going off to London like this?'

'I'm surrised you didn't go yourself.'

'I'd have gone willingly enough in a proper manner, but I will not go rattling off to London behind a fire and a pot of water. I don't know what things are coming to. Fancy having it on your tombstone, boiled by a railway engine, rest in peace! No, Mr. Shaw, I was brought up to travel with horses, as God intended, and I don't care what Nicholas says. Steady, Daisy!'

She was talking suddenly to the horse as she drew the gig to a halt by the stable lane, just as Anna had once done. Robert jumped down, and tried to speak a word of thanks, but once again she cut him short as her words rippled on.

'Nonsense. I've enjoyed your talk. Don't forget, will you?

Come to see Anna. Good night!'

So Anna was coming. He had not seen her since last summer, and she would be back in the town tomorrow. The thought was very much with him in the counting-house next morning, and he found himself watching the clock. The *Invincible* coach had a name for good timekeeping, and he was sure she would be stepping out at the Red Lion at exactly half-past eleven. Ellen would be there to meet her, and he wished he could be there himself. But he knew only too well that he had no right to leave the mill, and he was now regretting that promise to John Phillips. If he had had the news of Anna he would certainly not have made it; but he had promised to go to Greenfield this evening, and there was nothing for it but to keep the promise.

At least he was made welcome. Both John and Susan received him warmly, and both showed a pleased interest in his news of Anna. John, however, seemed thoughtful, as if he had something on his mind; and after supper, while Susan was upstairs with the children, he came to it plainly.

'It's rather a problem,' he said quietly. 'The fact is that trade doesn't get any better, and I'm beginning to wonder if it ever will.'

'Surely it's only for a time? The handloom men can hardly buy bread, and that's bound to touch the corn trade. But surely it must improve in time?'

'By the way the weather's going we can expect a bad harvest. That will make the corn dearer still, and they'll buy even less of it. But the fact is, Robert, there are too many steam mills now. There's one at Burnley, and one at Blackburn, both within a wagon journey. I lost trade to both of them in those dry months last year, and it hasn't come back.'

'I'm sorry.' Robert spoke gently, sure now that the man was worried. 'But what have you in mind?'

'I suppose I'll have to have steam, though I'll never have my old trade back, even if I do have an engine and a boiler. That isn't to be hoped for. This new age takes things to people's doorsteps, and they expect them there.'

'I don't understand.'

'In the old days a corn mill had to be where the water was, and the corn had to come to the mill. But these steam mills are going up where they'll suit the customer, and no one will send his corn a dozen miles to be ground when there's a steam mill down the street. Do you see it?'

'I'm afraid I do. But I hadn't thought of it.'

'I've had to think of it. If I put steam in here, so that I can keep going all the summer, I expect I'll keep the local trade, but I shan't get back the trade from a dozen miles away. And ought I to spend a hundred pounds or more on steam when I know the trade won't all come back?'

'You mustn't risk losing the local trade.'

'I suppose you're right.' For a long moment John waited, and then he seemed almost to be speaking his thoughts aloud. 'My father built this mill. He built it bigger than he needed, because he saw an expanding trade, and believed in it. And he was right for a time. The trade did grow, and a few years ago we were using nearly all the mill. Now I use hardly three-quarters of it, and soon it won't be much more than half. So what am I to do?'

Robert sat silent, knowing of no good answer he could give;

and he was still in thought when a gentle sound of wheels broke into the room. He turned at once, looking through the window as a black and red gig came slowly to the house. In the sunlight of the summer evening there could be no mistaking the driver.

'It's Anna,' said John happily. 'She's remembered us.'

A moment later he was out of the door in welcome, and he gave a steadying hand to Anna as she stepped down.

'Good evening, John! Is it too late to call on you? Good

evening, Robert! I didn't know you were here.'

It might have been last summer again, when she had been staying here. She had set the mood at once, falling into the same easy terms with both of them, and she was smilingly affectionate as Susan came hurrying down to greet her.

'Do I come too soon?' she asked. 'Without giving you

warning?'

'Of course you don't. It's good of you to come.'

'As a matter of fact, I'm escaping. Ellen was getting Betsy to bed, and I seem to have been doing that sort of thing for

months. So I borrowed the gig and left them to it.'

They settled themselves in the parlour, and it was Anna who seemed to lead the talk. She turned to Susan, asking how she was and how the children were. Then it was John's turn, and after a moment or two of talk she asked him how trade was going.

'Not very well,' he answered quietly.

'No?' She showed no surprise, but her tone was sympathetic. 'I thought it mightn't be good.'

'Now how do you know that?'

'How could I not know?' She sounded almost a little rueful. 'It's the family trade. I tell you, John, I've heard only two kinds of talk all winter, babies and corn mills, and I can't talk of anything else. I've asked Susan about the babies, and now I'm asking you about the mill.'

'I see.' He laughed softly at her tone. 'But what do your

brothers say about the trade?'

'Not what it used to be.'

'Why not?'

'Too many people not buying bread. Too many steam mills to take the trade that's left.'

'You seem to know it very well.'

'I ought to, from the amount of talk I've heard.'

'What will your brothers do?'

'Work hard and hope for the best. It's all they can think of.'
'You almost sound as if it isn't enough.'

'My brothers aren't noted for thinking. There's only Nick who has a brain, really.'

'Equal to yours, you mean? But if your brothers ought to have thought of something more, what is it?'

'What Nick thought of?' She hesitated, but her eyes were steadily on his. 'What Nick did was to turn from corn to cotton.'

'Heavens, Anna!' There was a note of sheer surprise now. 'You're not suggesting I turn cotton-spinner, are you? At my time of life?'

'I'm not suggesting anything. You asked me what Nick did, and I've told you. That's all.'

'I see.' He nodded, and still seemed surprised. 'I must say that you're ingenious, but I don't think I shall give up cornmilling. I've been at it for too long.'

'Of course you have,' came the placid answer. 'That hadn't occurred to me at all.'

'But I thought you said---'

'I was thinking of part of the mill. The part you can't use for corn. Why not use it for something else?'

'Well---' He sounded a little less positive now. 'I'm not sure that it's practicable.'

'Why not? Nick has always said that a corn man is the one who can best turn to cotton.'

'Anna, I don't know where you learned to be persuasive, but you're a downright danger. You'd make any nonsense sound attractive.' He turned suddenly, almost irritably, to Robert. 'What do you think of all this? Is it practicable?'

'I should advise against spinning. You'd have to spend a lot of money on throstles, and the market isn't good. Power-weaving might be different. Once it becomes safe there's going to be quite a rush, and there's no reason why you shouldn't be in it if you want to be.'

'I don't know anything about power-looms.'

'Nor does anybody else, in this town, so we shall all start level.'

'You're nearly as bad as Anna, and I don't know what you'll be persuading me into next, between you.' He looked, half amusedly, from one of them to the other. 'Fortunately it isn't practicable yet, as you admit, and I won't even think about it

till it is. Now that's enough. You didn't come here, I suppose, to talk about trades?'

'Of course I didn't.' Anna's smile was suddenly lighting her face, and her voice had a warmer tone. 'I came to see Susan, and for nothing else at all.'

'Not to see me at all?'

'Of course I did.' The smile broadened and she turned. 'And I'm glad to see Robert too. I'm back with my friends again.'

20

PERSISTENT ELLEN

NICHOLAS came back next day, with Tom and Susie, and instead of arriving in the early afternoon they came by the last coach from Manchester. Robert did not, therefore, see Nicholas that night. There had been no events at the mill that needed a report, and he thought he had better not intrude. But on Sunday a short note from Ellen was brought to his lodging, asking him to go for supper that evening, and when he went across she had very much the air of being hostess on her own account, not on anyone else's. Anna was quiet and friendly, and it was not till after supper that Nicholas showed much interest. Then he explained why he had been late in returning yesterday. There had been a rush of people leaving London after the Coronation, and the railway had had more passengers than seats. Nicholas, with a reserved coach that could seat six, was in no trouble; but others were, and he heard one of them, who had a wife and daughter with him, arguing heatedly with a railway official. The man's speech showed that he was from Lancashire, and Nicholas had ended by offering the spare seats in his own coach. The man named himself as Thomas Knowles. of Bolton, and it came out that he was a yarn merchant. Nicholas was not the man to waste such a chance.

'So there it was,' he said cheerfully, 'and all because we'd let him ride with us. What's that bit about casting bread on the waters?'

'Thou shalt find it after many days,' said Anna promptly. 'Especially, I suppose, if you cast in the right place.'

Nicholas went on. The two families had been on excellent terms by the time they reached Manchester, and the end of it had been a hasty visit to Bolton, only ten miles away, on the Saturday morning. Knowles lived next to his work, and there had been cakes and cups of chocolate for Tom and Susie while their host took Nicholas to the counting-house. Which was why they had been late on their return to Colne.

'Though, mind you,' Nicholas said, 'it was worth it. Of course I didn't know what you and Dick had sold while I was away, but I didn't worry about that. I sold him all he'd take, and we'll have to find it somehow.'

That was as far as he was allowed to get. Ellen swooped down on them with a flood of talk, and Nicholas looked rueful and then let her have her way. But he was down at the mill next morning, very firmly on business, and it soon appeared that they were in trouble. Dick had done as well in Manchester as Nicholas had in Bolton, and between the two of them they had sold more yarn than they had. Nicholas had fortunately specified two weeks delivery to Bolton, and some calculations showed that if the throstles worked every hour of daylight this might just be possible. Nicholas said grimly that it would have to be possible; and then Dick pointed out that they would need at least another sixty bales of raw cotton for what had to be done.

Nicholas reached for his hat and went striding away in search of Barnard Crook. He came back to announce that Crook had one single bale to offer, and no more. He had cleared the rest of his stock to Holroyd only last Saturday.

'Could we get some back from him?' said Dick.

'We might, but we aren't going to.' He turned suddenly on Robert. 'We need cotton from Liverpool, and that's your work. Off you go.'

It was then five past nine. At five to ten Robert was at the Mason's Arms with his bag in his hand and banknotes in his pocket. At ten o'clock he was climbing into the *Tradesman*

coach. At half-past two he was in a railway coach, and at half-past four he was in Liverpool. By six o'clock he was aboard the Northern Light discharging cotton from Savannah, and in twenty minutes he had struck his bargain. Then he went to a firm of water-carriers, and by half-past seven the next morning they had a fly-boat alongside the Northern Light. He paid for the cotton, and then swung himself over the side as the fly-boat moved off. He stayed with it till it had entered the canal, made sure that the dues were paid, and then he stepped ashore as it began its journey. Then he made his way to the railway station.

He explained the details next morning. The fly-boat would take three days and arrive late on Thursday if all went well. Nicholas said he hoped so, and went on to arrange that a man should be on the Wanless wharf through Thursday to bring word of arrival. Unloading was then to go on till darkness

stopped it, in sun or rain.

It chanced to be sun, but by five o'clock on Thursday afternoon there was no word of the fly-boat. Nicholas went off for his tea. Robert stayed at the mill with Dick, and at a quarter to six the man from the wharf came hurrying. The boat, he said, had made fast at Wanless, and the crew had disappeared into the Grinning Rat. Unloading was not their concern.

'It was certainly Robert's concern, and he went off to despatch the unloaders and then to report to Nicholas at Cumberland House. There, as soon as the door was opened to him, he saw Anna, with Fanny and Betsy, all of them dressed for going out. Nicholas was at the foot of the stair, and his face eased as he heard of the fly-boat.

'Good,' he said tersely. 'But I'd like you to go out to Wanless

yourself, and make sure of things.'

'Very well.'

'And when you come back bring me a handful of that cotton. I want to know what it's like.'

Then Anna thrust herself calmly into the talk. Betsy wants

to see this boat. How far is it to Wanless?'

'Two miles or so. But if I'm walking out there myself——'
'I doubt if you should take Betsy. You mightn't know how
to handle her.'

'I wasn't thinking of Betsy by herself.'

'Oh, I see.' There was a distinct touch of amusement in her now. 'What do you say to it, Nick? Is Mr. Shaw in a hurry?'
They set off along the metalled road, but soon they turned

into a rough and dusty track that was climbing steeply enough to make a heavy wagon go another way. But it was a fine high walk for a summer evening. Soon they were on the top of a ridge, and when they were over the crest the track began to drop as steeply as it had climbed. In another half-mile it was curving between high banks, and then, suddenly and surprisingly, they were at Wanless, where the fly-boat was moored to the wharf; just as a boat had moored before, almost a year ago, and Anna had come riding out with Nicholas.

The setting was the same, but the scene was not. It had been an idle wharf that night, but now there were wagons and a crane and teams of horses. There was a babel of voices, a clack of pawls as a bale came spinning and swaying up, and then the soft hiss of the band-brake as the bale came down and the jib of the crane swung round. Robert stepped quickly forward as a loaded wagon went creaking past, and from one of the bales he pulled the tuft of cotton that Nicholas had asked for as a sample. For a moment he held it in his hand, remembering how Nicholas and Barnard Crook had held the white tufts to the sun that other night, and he wondered if Anna had a memory of it, too. Then he lifted his eyes again, and he was watching the bales on the wagon, flecked with the gleaming white, as the team pulled steadily along the track by the Wanless Water.

'Last time I came this way,' said Anna, 'I came along that track with Nick. Do you know when it was?'

'A year ago, the night I first saw you.'

'Yes.' She spoke quietly, and she seemed intent on the receding wagon. 'We wanted a ride that night, so we took the long way round. You were with Mr. Crook.'

'You remember even that?'

'Yes. Do you think that child is safe?'

Her eyes were on the wharf again. Both the girls had gone to watch more closely, and Betsy was now on the extreme edge, leaning forward as she tried to look into the fly-boat's hold. Fanny, intent on a swinging bale, was taking no notice of her.

'No,' he answered. 'Also, I'm not sure what language she's hearing from those men.'

'I am. Not that it matters, really. She's bound to hear plenty. All the same——'

They moved forward and withdrew a protesting Betsy from the edge; and again the memory of that other evening was strong upon him as he saw the black smoothness of the water and the plume of smoke from the Grinning Rat. He turned to look at it, and some impulse seemed to take him forward along the wharf, with Anna at his side. The bridge that took a road across was in front of them, and they moved slowly under the steep stone arch. Then it was suddenly quiet, with the sound of voices hushed by the bridge between. Opposite was the alehouse, but the door was shut, and nothing was to be seen of men; exactly as it had been a year ago.

'If you had not come this way,' he said, 'I might never have

known you.'

He was following his own thought, not making very clear what he meant, but she seemed to have no difficulty. She might almost have been following that thought herself.

'Nor should I,' she said, 'if you had not come this way.'

'Would that have mattered-to you?'

'It would have been less interesting.'

The tone expressed nothing, and she was looking at the water rather than at him. For a moment he studied her face, but he found it inscrutable.

'I wish you had been here more,' he said.

'Well—' She broke suddenly into a smile, though her eyes were watchful. I did once tell you I enjoyed my visits. I seem to have some friends here now.'

'And you know that I'm one of them?'

'I hope so.'

'It's plain enough, surely. I've taken every chance I've had to see you. You must have noticed it?'

'Well, perhaps-just once or twice-it looked a little like

that.'

'You don't mind?'

'I could have avoided you, if I'd tried to. I suppose you hadn't thought of that?'

'I don't quite understand.'

'Never mind. But if you want me to be quite plain about it, I've enjoyed your company.'

'Anna, you shouldn't have to spend your days going from

one place to another. You're too good for it.'

'That might be true of you as well. You're perhaps too good to be a clerk in a mill—even Nick's clerk.'

'Everyone has to start somewhere. But suppose I do manage to become something more.'

'I'm sure you will.'

'But it ought to make a difference to you as well. I want it to. I mean——'

He stopped, feeling that this was not quite the way to say it, and that perhaps it ought not to be said at all at present. Anna waited for a moment. Then she spoke easily.

'That sounds a little difficult. Perhaps I'd better not say I

understand it.'

'Yes, I know. But what I---'

'Perhaps I shall understand it better later.'

'I'm sorry if I've---'

'Why be sorry? I'm not.'

The smile had come back to her now, and it was in her eyes as well. Then she nodded.

'We'd better leave things as they are,' she said.

'As long as you understand.'

'I'm supposed to be in charge of Betsy, and I don't see the

child. Perhaps we'd better look.'

They walked slowly under the bridge again, now in a companionable silence, and it was perhaps time that they did. Betsy had jumped aboard the fly-boat. She was now on its after-deck, pushing the heavy tiller from one side to another while Fanny, rather too dignified to jump aboard, stood on the edge of the wharf listening to the talk of the hot and busy men. They had all but filled the second wagon now, and Robert was satisfied that the cotton would be in the opening room when the mill began tomorrow. He said so, and Anna nodded.

'Then perhaps we ought to go. It's Betsy's bedtime, and

Fanny's hearing what isn't good for her. Come along.'

They walked back without waste of time, and at Cumberland House Robert did not linger. It was time to be at the mill again, so he hurried off. Nicholas asked a sharp question about the progress of the work, and then peered at the tuft of cotton through an optic glass.

'You've done well,' he declared tersely. 'You've bought the

right stuff. How's Anna?'

'Excellent.'

'Did you see my wife?' The old sardonic tone was suddenly in his voice. She wanted to ask you to supper. She said if she didn't see you I'd better ask you myself. Sunday night. Eight o'clock. Is it all right?'

It was not. He had promised that he would go to Greenfield

on Sunday night, and there was nothing for it but to say so. Nicholas listened placidly.

'All right,' he said. 'From the mood Ellen seems to be in, I

expect she'll give you another time.'

He did not explain what he meant by that, and Robert was left to note that the invitation had again come from Ellen. He knew by this time that Ellen was very much a Thornber, fully able to go her own way and give her own invitations, but he did not quite understand what Nicholas had meant by her present mood.

Something of it came out on Sunday evening. Robert had been at Greenfield for scarcely ten minutes when Anna drove to the door, again in the black and red gig; and Robert, with some encouraging memories of her talk the other night, could hardly miss the thought that this might possibly have something to do with his own presence here. She could easily have heard from Ellen that he was expected here tonight. Yet she seemed to go out of her way to deny it.

'I feel I'm intruding,' she said. 'This is Ellen's notion, not mine. She asked me to come.'

'Don't talk of intruding,' said Susan. 'It's a poor thing if you can't call on your sister. What does Ellen want?'

'I don't know. She may just want an hour without me. But she said they're having a sale-of-work at the church this week, to buy more oatmeal for weavers, and would you like to send her a cake?'

'Certainly I'll send her a cake. She must know perfectly well that I would. Are you telling me she asked you to come all this way just to say that?'

'Yes.' Anna was looking squarely at her sister. 'I know it sounds a little thin, but that is what she said. Of course, as I've told you, she may just have wanted to be rid of me.'

'Splendid!' said John. 'We're glad to see you. But did she speak of her brother at all?'

'She's been speaking about him on and off all week. John, what is this tale of yours about Tom and a lady? I've been hearing it all week.'

'Nothing very much.' He turned suddenly to Robert. 'You haven't heard this, have you? But I did some more thinking about that steam engine, and I decided to go to Manchester about it. I went on Monday, and I stayed at the York Hotel.

On the Tuesday night, when I went into dinner, there was Tom Thornber. He must have arrived during the day.'

'Yes?'

'It was Tom all right, and dinner for three. He had two guests and they looked to me like a man and his daughter, quite an elderly man.'

'What about the daughter?' said Anna.

'Oh, about Tom's age, and about as fat. Of course, I thought the man must be someone Tom had business with—until I noticed that Tom hadn't an eye of any sort for him. He was all eyes for the daughter.'

'How was she taking it?'

'All smiles for Tom. So what would you have done next, Anna?'

'I'd have had a good look at her.'

'That's exactly what I did. I walked straight up to their table, and said "Good evening".'

'Yes?' Anna's voice was shaking with delight. 'Was Tom pleased?'

'He looked as if he'd like to kill me.'

'How about Miss?'

'Oh, she was polite, so Tom had to introduce us. Mr. Thomas Ratcliffe and his daughter Ruth.'

'But what's she like?'

'All smiles and fat. She was eating a jelly just then, the sort that shakes on the plate, and she was just like the jelly. Every time she laughed she shook.'

'But what is it all about?'

'I don't know. Except that Tom has somehow met Ruth Ratcliffe, and they seem very pleased with each other.'

'Is anything going to come of it?'

'Why ask me?'

'Well, it's what Ellen's been asking all week.'

'That may be the point. I happened to see Ellen on Thursday, and I told her about this. Now she's asking for a cake.'

'Cake?' For once Anna looked baffled. 'You said the girl was like a jelly, but you didn't mention cakes.'

'Have you ever heard of Ellen as a matchmaker? She's tried quite hard with Tom, you know.'

'I'm not blind.'

'But I think she rather fell out with Tom over that, when he went off to Manchester and forgot a picnic.'

'Thank Heaven!'

'But Ellen's persistent. If she can't make one match she might make another, and this Ruth Ratcliffe might be the last straw.'

'John, what do you mean?'

'She may throw—somebody—into somebody else's company.'
His forehead was puckering for a moment as he looked at a reddening Anna. Then he glanced at Robert, and back to Anna.

'Let's hope she gets her cake,' he said happily. 'All in all, I think she deserves it.'

21

THE INN ON THE TURNPIKE

St. Helen's MILL was driven hard, and it stood the test well. This, in one sense, might have been expected. Sam Hartley knew his work, the new machines had been well cared for, and they ought, as he said, to stand a few hours' extra work without disaster. Dick Bradley, who looked more at men than at machines, thought it less certain. Feelings were running high about the People's Charter, and not every spinner would help his employer out of trouble. So Dick watched carefully, and he looked as pleased as anybody when all went well. The spinners at St. Helen's might like the Charter, but they also liked their Old Nick. They thought he was queer, but they liked him, and his blunt talk and his readiness with the crackling jest. So when he said that he had sold more yarn than he had, and that a special effort would be needed if he were not to be disgraced by broken promises, the spinners were willing. They told each other delightedly, and with a rich wealth of detail, that the Old Man had been raving drunk and in pursuit of women when he made those promises; and then they put their backs into it. The wheel turned and the throstles hummed through all the hours of daylight, and the yarn wound steadily on the cops. Nicholas ticked off the daily quota with growing satisfaction, and the well-paid men had less leisure and more beer. They used both, said Dick, in talk about the People's Charter.

Deliveries were made on time, and the mill returned to normal. Robert was able to see something of Anna again, and it was Ellen who seemed to make the chances for him. She not only invited him to her house, but also showed a fine habit, when she had him there, of seeing that he had a chance to talk with Anna. He had certainly no wish to stop her, but he did wonder what Nicholas was thinking. He had not forgotten that flash of insight at the end of the Gas Company meeting. Nicholas had certainly guessed something then, and he was not the man to be blind to what was happening in his own house, especially where his Anna was concerned. But Nicholas had said nothing before, and he said nothing now.

He came noisily into the counting-house one day in mid-July, slammed the Manchester Times on the table, pointed to a four-

column article, and asked what they thought of that.

It was about the People's Charter, and it was not comforting. A body called the Birmingham Political Union had proposed the setting-up of a Convention of the Industrious Classes, to be elected by the votes of all who would have votes when the Charter had become law. Delegates could be elected by public meetings, and have their expenses paid by a public subscription to be called the National Rent. Such a Convention, it was argued, would represent millions of voters, and even a House of Commons would have to show respect to the People's Charter when it was presented by so dignified a body. The Charter could then hardly fail to be passed into law, and a new day would dawn.

'Well?' asked Nicholas. 'Are these Birmingham folk mad?' 'Yes,' said Dick. 'They don't know what they're touching.'

'You think they'll burn their fingers?'

'Burn?' Dick flung back the word as though it had hit him. 'If they start a big enough blaze they'll burn some other folk too, and perhaps some factories and houses. Did you see the Northern Star last week?'

'Of course I didn't.'

'It's started bawling for the Charter, so we'll soon have every

spinner and every Jack Weaver shouting that way too. They'll take the tune from the paper.'

'But you talked about burning?'

'O'Connor won't keep to this twaddle about delegates and a Convention. He'll be shouting soon for something worse, and he'll probably get it. That's to say, we shall get it.'

'Is there anything cheerful you can say?'

'The men here have a liking for you, so I don't think they'll burn this place yet.'

'We'll hope not.'

Nicholas spoke curtly, and let the matter drop. Whether he was thinking about it in the days that followed was not known, but others certainly were. The talk in the Hole i' th' Wall was proof enough of that; and Robert learned, rather to his surprise, that even Anna had it in her mind.

That was on the Saturday, a day he was to find memorable. Ellen had said she had ordered a quart of cream from a farm the other side of Little Marsden, which was a village between Colne and Burnley, and she asked if Anna would collect it for her on Saturday. Anna agreed; and in some manner, though it was never very clear who first thought of it, Robert was invited to take the drive with her, this being the day when he finished work at five o'clock. He was at Cumberland House as soon as he could be clear of the mill, and nobody raised the objection that this was a grey and clouded afternoon, cold for July, and with a clear threat of rain. A thin spatter of it fell in the stable yard as they went to the gig, but Robert was noticing only that Fanny and Betsy had not appeared this time. It seemed that he was to be alone with Anna, which was more than he had expected.

'Do you think we shall get wet?' he asked, as Anna turned the gig into the street.

'Yes, by the look of it. Ellen's promised to dry us.'

She sounded quite casual about it, and for a moment he watched her. Then he spoke carefully.

'Ellen seems to be rather thoughtful towards us.'

'In several ways. One of which we've been told about.'

She flashed it back at him, and there was an amused undertone in her voice that he could not miss. It occurred to him that the point was delicate.

'I haven't liked to feel sure,' he said.

'You aren't living with Ellen. Besides, I know the ways of sisters-in-law.'

'Oh, but——' He did not quite understand her amused tone. 'I do hope Ellen's odd ways are not making things difficult?'

'Mightn't you have found things more difficult without her odd ways?'

'It's you I'm thinking of.'

'Oh, I see.' Her tone now could have meant anything. 'Really, Robert, you needn't trouble to protect me from Ellen. As a matter of fact, I'm rather grateful to her, for several things. She's no fool, though she may sometimes talk like one.'

'Oh, yes. It's only that I wondered, after what John said,

whether---'

'What is that place? Do you know anything about it?'

They were passing the ruin of the ancient manor house above the parsonage, and she was pointing to it with her whip. She had cut calmly into his question, and he was not sorry to give it up.

'It's Colne Hall,' he said. 'Or was.'

'It's a glory departed.' She turned, looking over her shoulder at the remains of mullioned windows and the arch of a fine old door. What a view it has! Miles all round them, and right across to Pendle Hill!'

'When the mist lets you.'

'Practical man!' She looked at him, smiling, and then went suddenly into something else. 'Do you think Nick's worried about this Chartist business?'

'How do you know about it?'

'Because I can read, and I sometimes read a newspaper.' Her tone had changed, and she sounded grave enough now. 'When Nick came home talking, I got out some copies of his *Manchester Times* and began to read them seriously. What's it going to mean, in Colne?'

'Nobody knows.' He saw that she was in earnest, and he tried to give her an answer. 'You've seen what these people want? A vote for every man in the country, secret voting and all the rest of it. Of course no government could grant all that. It's obvious.'

They were out of the town now, spinning along the level turnpike, and another spatter of rain came coldly on his face. He glanced at Anna, and saw that her teasing mood had wholly gone. She was waiting for what he had to say.

'Of course, this Convention is a device to put pressure on the government. It's to ask the government for what the government can't give, and that's when the trouble's likely to start.'

'Ye-es.' She spoke musingly, and she seemed to be fitting all this into the clearness of her mind. 'That's more or less what I

thought. It may make things difficult?'

'I think it's bound to. It seems that these Birmingham men-

'I was thinking a little nearer home than that.'

'Here?' He was a little disconcerted by the sharpness of her interruption. 'There may be some local trouble, of course, but I don't think you need concern yourself. They won't burn St. Helen's mill.'

'I should hope they won't! Did anyone suggest it?'

'Then what worries you?'

'I didn't say I was worried. I said Nick was. Isn't this where

we turn off?'

They left the turnpike, using a country road now to Little Marsden, and Anna's questions seemed to die away. There was only the clop of the horse, the crunch of the wheels, and the plop and drip of rain. It was no longer a rain that threatened. It was continuous now, heavy enough to be noticed, and with every promise of getting heavier. He turned up his collar against it, and Anna produced from under the seat a stiff and uncouth cape. He took the reins while she adjusted it to her shoulders.

'A present from Nick,' she said cheerfully. 'He brought it back from London with him. It's Mackintosh cloth, and it's said to keep water out.'

'It looks like being tested.'

Anna took the reins again, and the puddles were deepening in the road as they splashed through Little Marsden. They found the farm and the cream, and then they had the wind in their faces as they began the journey home. That made it wetter, and they sat tight together on the seat with the tarpaulin round their knees. Their hats began to drip, and Anna's fingers must have been numbed as she held the reins through her sodden gloves. He offered to take over, but she would not hear of it.

'All the same,' she said, 'I hope Ellen's ready to dry us. I'm

afraid Daisy's tiring.'

The horse was certainly flagging; and then, as they came to

the turnpike again, the rain was suddenly worse. It came hissing down, an unbroken sheet of grey that left no sky to be seen, and Robert was quickly wondering what shelter was to be had.

'We'll have to make a halt,' he said. 'Would you mind the Nelson?'

The Nelson was a lonely inn at a crossroad on the turnpike. It could serve two towns and it did a useful trade, but he spoke cautiously, not quite sure of the propriety of an inn on a Saturday night. Anna, however, took a more practical view.

'Not if it has a roof,' she said. 'Besides, there's Daisy, and she needs a rub and a munch.'

Daisy seemed to know it She had sighted the inn herself, and she turned from the road without being told to. She stopped of her own accord by an elegant door, and at once there was a welcome. The Nelson was used to this, as an inn on a turnpike had to be. Tired horses and rainswept travellers were not new here, and there was a groom at once to take charge of the flagging Daisy. There was a fire to dry wet coats, and the landlord took it for granted that his guests were in need of food. Chops, he said, could be ready in ten minutes.

'Innkeeper's ten?' said Anna calmly. 'Never mind. We're out of the rain, and I'll have the chop and a pint of porter. For a summer's evening, I don't think much of the weather.'

They had the chops in a deserted coffee-room. Two jaded bagmen in a far corner were the only others, and they were almost out of earshot. The waiter padded softly. The chops were good, the room warm and cosy, and Anna seemed lazily content.

'I'm enjoying this,' she said placidly. 'And if Ellen has to wait for us she can blame herself. I'm not a duck.' She looked to the window and the rain on the streaming glass. Anyway, I'm enjoying this chop.'

The waiter returned, deftly taking the plates and then putting the cups and the coffee-pot on the table. Anna sat back until he had gone, and then she leaned forward to pour the coffee. She sipped delicately at her own, and she was in no haste about adding sugar to it. She seemed rather to be collecting her thoughts. Then she spoke with a slow care.

'Missing out all the men who have cotton mills, how might this Charter trouble affect other men?'

'Well-' He did not see the drift of this, but he tried to

answer her. 'I fancy they're worried too. I know Hoyle is, for one.'

'But he's a factory owner too, so he isn't the man I'm asking about. How of the men who don't own factories—yet?'

'Who do you mean?'

He spoke sharply, surprised by the question. She watched

him with a smile, and then she nodded.

'Robert, who do you think I should be talking about? I'm talking about you, and the men like you, if there are any. I've an interest in what happens to you. What will this Chartist trouble mean to anyone who wants to set up on his own? I

suppose you've been thinking about that?'

'Oh, yes.' He had, in fact, been thinking about it a good deal, and not very happily. 'We've had riots in the town already, and it needed soldiers to put down the last one. But if we have riots in a dozen towns at once, the soldiers can't be everywhere. There aren't enough of them.'

'So it wouldn't be a good time for a new venture?'

'No.'

'I suppose there will be power-looms in Colne, some day?'

'As soon as men are sure they won't be smashed. Then there'll be a rush to do it.'

'Would that be the best time to set up new?'

'What do you mean?'

'I'm not quite sure. But I suppose you'd have to rent a room as a factory?'

'Yes. And then buy second-hand looms.'

'But if everybody is doing it at the same time, mightn't the rents go up? And the price of looms? I don't know, of course.'

'Don't you?' He was staring at her now. 'I had never thought

of that.'

'I was just wondering. But the moment when everybody is frightened might be the moment to do it cheaply.'

'It might be-now you point it out.'

'You won't think I'm trying to push you into anything, will you?'

'But you're suggesting something?'

'Let me give you some more coffee.'

The light was fading in the room, and the candles had been brought. The rain on the window was hardly to be heard now, and the bagmen had gone. Even the hum of voices in the distant ale-room seemed to be dying down.

'We should move soon,' he said quietly. 'We've still two miles to go.'

'And Ellen promised us tea. The best Twankay.' Again Anna seemed to be musing on something. 'I don't think that troubled days are always the wrong time to make a move. They frighten the competitors. The lesser men wait for safer days, and they miss the moment.'

'Anna, I'd missed this point.'

'It may be the wrong point. I've said I don't know much about it, and I don't want to influence you at all.'

'No. But——' There was a throb of excitement in his voice now. 'I'll have a word with Hoyle about this.'

'Why Hoyle?'

'Because if I start at all I'll have to do it with Hoyle. It's a question of costs, and he'll have to put up some money.'

'Oh, I see.' Her forehead was puckering for a moment. 'I hadn't known that. Does it mean that you and Mr. Hoyle would be partners?'

'Something like that.'

'I see.' Again she seemed to be musing. 'Then you're probably right about having a word with him. Do I see you looking at the clock?'

Once more the Nelson knew how to do it, and in a matter of minutes the bill was paid and the gig brought round. Coats and gloves had been dried, and Anna stood under the porch, adjusting the cape of Mackintosh cloth. The rain was gentle now, hardly requiring a cape, but the dusk was setting in and there was a chill in the wind to excuse an extra wrapping. Robert made sure that the tarpaulin was ready by the seat. Then he returned to Anna.

'Shall we go?'

'I think we'd better.' In the grey light of the porch it was hard to see her face. 'I haven't met Mr. Hoyle. He married your sister, didn't he?'

'Yes. Jane.'

'I haven't met her, either. Don't you think it's time I did?' 'If you wish.'

'I do.'

'Then I'll arrange it.'

'Thank you.' She stepped forward to the gig, and then, with her foot on the step, she turned her head to him again. 'The sooner the better.'

JANE AND ANNA

ROBERT went about it cautiously. He was by no means sure how Anna and Jane would mix, and not only because they were so different in their ways. At this moment there was a special cause for doubt. Even Robert now knew that Jane was expecting her first child. It would not be till October, and she was still going about her affairs, but she was different. She was less boisterous than she had been, and less predictable, capable now of reacting in unexpected ways. Joe was looking almost harassed, which was a source of some amusement in the Hole i' th' Wall. The longer married made some ribald comments, and Robert was the only one not amused. Jane, after all, was his sister.

He went to see Jane two evenings later, on the Monday. It was another wet night of that soaking summer, with the rain pouring steadily down, and she looked pleased to see him. Joe looked even more pleased. He helped Robert out of his wet coat, and then he said he would be slipping out for a minute, if Robert would look after Jane. He wanted to see a man about

a bit of business.

'He's gone for a drink,' said Jane, as Joe went hurrying off. 'He's been looking for a chance all night. Are you wet?'

'I was a lot wetter the other night.'

He began to tell her of his journey in search of the cream. If Jane should then ask him who Anna was, it might be a short jump to what he really wanted. But after the first ten words Jane stopped him.

'Is it Anna England you're talking about?'

'Well, yes.'

'I've been wondering when you'd say something.'

'Something about what?'

'Don't look so soft.' She watched him with amusement as he felt his face redden. 'I told you a twelvemonth back there'd be some lass to notice your face.'

'It's nothing to do with my face.'

'That's just as well. What do you think she'll say, if you want to bring her here?'

'She'll probably say it's good of you.'

'And what she'll think is that I want to look at her. She'll be right, too.'

'Don't be silly. As a matter of fact, she said she'd like to

meet you.'

'Did she?' Jane was suddenly sharp. 'Well, if she wants a look at your sister she's thinking pretty hard, and you'd better look out.'

'Jane, you really are---'

'All right, all right! Bring her for tea on Saturday, and let me see what's caught you. I suppose it had to happen sometime. Where do you say you took her the other night?'

'Marsden. Then we had to stop at the Nelson as we came home. I really don't see what else we could have done, in that

weather.'

'What's worrying you? You'll need to have her by herself sometime, you know. You won't get far if you don't.'

'Well, as long as she doesn't think---'

'Oh, shut up. If she didn't want to go in, she could have stood in the door and screamed. I'll bet she didn't though.'

'Of course not. But---'

'Did she have a good supper? I wonder if it's the same waiter.'

'Do you know the Nelson, Jane?'

'Where do you think Joe used to take me? Now you bring her on Saturday, and then I'll tell you what I think,'

Anna made no difficulty, and said that Saturday would suit her excellently. An eyebrow lifted slightly as she asked whether Jane had seemed willing.

'Very willing. She said she'd like to see you.'

'Oh?' The eyebrow lifted a little further. 'Did she really say that?'

'She was quite positive about it.'

'I should say she's often positive.'

'But do you know her?'

'Ellen once pointed her out. When's her child due?'

'Now, who told you--'

'Nobody needed to tell me. When is it?'

'October, I think.'

'You've another sister, haven't you, who can look after her?'

'Mary Ann.'

'I hope she knows what's expected of her?'

'I shouldn't think she knows very much.'

'They often don't. Very well, then. Saturday it shall be.'

So he had to wait for Saturday, and he found an interest through the rest of the week in the upset that began in Waterside. The contractors for the gasworks descended suddenly on the town, and were busy on the flat ground by the mill green. driving in pegs, marking out foundations, and hiring handloom men, strayed farmhands, and anyone else who thought he could dig. Loads of bricks began to arrive, and strange things made in iron. Hour by hour the loaded wagons rumbled through the town, while all the cotton men and half the shopkeepers came strolling down to see what was going on. Everybody seemed good-humoured, and the satisfaction was not confined to the men who hoped to be supplied with gas. The weavers and farmhands in the trenches might dislike digging, but at least they were having wages. It was better than boiled nettles and a gift of oatmeal. It was not prosperity, but there was more money in the town than there had been; and Dick Bradley reported that not quite so many were reading the Northern Star, or listening as fiercely to the talk of the Chartists.

Then it was Saturday. Robert was away from the mill a little early, and by five o'clock he and Anna were climbing the stair behind the shop in Church Street. Joe, looking a little hot, as if he had hurried back from his factory to be in time for this, let them in himself, and he was carefully polite. So was Anna. Then Jane slipped away to the kitchen, and the duty of talk fell on Joe, who detested women's tea-parties. He may not have noted the faint quiver in Anna's forehead as she watched

him.

'You look a little hot, Mr. Hoyle. Have you been busy?'

'We're busy enough.'

'That's a pleasant change. Most of the men I meet say there isn't any trade. Of course, most of my family are corn men, and they say there won't be any corn this year.'

'They're about right.'

'But I've heard some cotton men complaining, too.'

'They're as bad as farmers. Nothing suits 'em.'

'That's just it, Mr. Hoyle. That's why it's pleasant to hear a man say he's busy.'

She was smiling at him in plain approval, and Joe began to look more interested.

'Oh, well--' He did his best at a modest cough. 'You have

to use your brains, nowadays, and some o' these chaps haven't any.'

'Or is it the way they look at things? Instead of going out

to find the trade, they say it doesn't come to them.'

'That's just what it is. You've put your finger right on it.' Joe was sitting up now, and he had quite forgotten that he was supposed to make small talk. 'They don't see past the ends o' their noses. Mind you, I don't mean your brother. He has some brains.'

'But what about you, Mr. Hoyle?'

'Oh, well——' He was beaming at her now. 'I do my best, and you can't do more.'

'Quite so.' Anna leaned back comfortably. 'I hear you're

busy with this Gas Company?'

'I'm doing very well out o' that. Your brother, too, mind. I can tell you're his sister.'

'Can you?' There was a sparkle in her eyes now. 'How can you tell it, Mr. Hoyle?'

'You're like him, and it's a bit more than looks, if I know anything. You've a brain in your head.'

'Thank you. But---'

Then Jane was suddenly back to call them to tea, and Anna was on her feet at once, the men standing back to give her way. Then, in the talk that followed, Jane was asking whether Anna would be staying for long in the town. Anna replied that she never seemed to stay for long in any town, and Jane nodded.

'Aye,' she said. 'You do a lot of looking after, don't you?'

'I do. Mostly when there's another one coming.'

'Oh aye,' said Jane, and she looked for once as if she were not quite sure what to say next. Anna seemed to notice nothing.

'Something's needed,' she went on easily, 'and it's mostly me.'

'It won't be, if you get wed.'

'No.' Anna gazed calmly at her. 'But they don't see any sign of that, so they're quite happy.'

'Perhaps they'll have a surprise, one day.'

'Would it really be a surprise if I married? Do I look as if I couldn't?'

'No.' Jane answered slowly, but she did not sound hostile. 'You look as if you could at any moment, to me.'

'It isn't quite like that, I assure you.' Anna, too, spoke slowly, with her eyes unwaveringly on Jane. 'But I'm glad you don't think I look impossible.'

'I'd never have thought that.'

'Some of my brothers do. They take me for granted now.'

'Aye. They'll go on using you while you let 'em.'

'I know they will.' For an instant Anna hesitated. 'But I'm told you have a younger sister you can make use of?'

'That's Mary Ann, for what she's worth, and she's not worth

much yet.'
Then, from the head of the table, Joe pushed himself sud-

denly into the talk.

'It's what we were talking about before tea,' he said. 'Brains. When the brains were given out, their Mary Ann was in the back row. So they gave her what they had left and it wasn't much.'

'That's enough, Joe,' said Robert, and he was watching the slight flush that had come to Jane. 'Let's talk of something else. We were at the Nelson last Saturday, and Jane says you used to take her there.'

'She's quite right. I've had some good meals at that place.

There's nowhere better for a good steak.'

'Joe's notion of a good steak,' said Jane, 'is four feet long and two feet thick.'

'With a pan of onions on it. I don't get 'em like that now, you know.'

'Don't you?' said Anna. 'But perhaps you will, when Mary Ann's here. I'm sure she can cook.'

'Aye, but what if she won't? There's a lot of won't about Mary Ann.'

'You'll have to coax her.'

'Have you tried coaxing Mary Ann? Tell you what, why don't you come and look after us, and to hell with Mary Ann?'

'I'm afraid I couldn't.'

'Why not? I'm no trouble. You can do just what you like, and have Robert in every night to sit with you.'

'Thanks.' She was laughing openly now. 'But I'm afraid my own family keep me busy.'

'But they won't be doing it just then?'

'I'm afraid they will.' The laughter died as she turned quietly to Robert. 'It looks as if I shall have to go into Yorkshire again. Bradford.'

'Oh?' He faced her in sudden dismay. 'The same sort of

thing?'

'Yes. Some time next month, I fancy. But I've only just heard, and I don't know it all yet.'

She spoke lightly and she turned the talk at once. She addressed herself again to Joe, and asked him how the gasworks was getting on. When did he think there would be some gas? Joe brightened at once.

'They're talking about November, but I don't think they will. It's just to keep folk quiet. Anyway, I hope so. I shan't have my own orders done by November, and if there's gas ready before I've given 'em the burners, they'll be saying something.'

'Oh, I see.' Her smile was suddenly vivid. 'But it's still good

to hear a man say he's busy.'

'Oh, I'm busy enough. I'm so busy I can't keep up with my regular trade. But a new trade's better, you know.'

'Why?'

'Well—' Joe expanded his chest comfortably and looked as if he would always be willing to explain to Anna. 'In an old trade there's a price for everything, and folk know what it is. Suppose a chap comes to me to buy nails. Well, he knows the price of nails, and that's all he'll pay, d'you see? But suppose he comes for gas burners. Does he know what burners cost?'

'I shouldn't think so.'

'Of course he doesn't. He has to ask me, and I don't half tell him.' Joe was suddenly chuckling with satisfaction. 'That's how the money's made. Get 'em in a trade they don't know, and they have to believe what you tell 'em.'

'And do they?'

'Well—quite a lot of 'em do, and you can always talk discounts to the others.'

'I see.' Anna was staring at him as if she were fascinated. 'What will happen when the gasworks opens? I suppose you'll be busier than ever?'

'Well, I might or I might not. It all depends if they take to the stuff. There's the stink of it, and that might put 'em off.' He chuckled happily. 'That's why I'm selling 'em the fittings, before they find out.'

It was as far as Joe was allowed to get. They had finished their meal, and Jane now intervened, taking them back to the parlour. But Anna was not now disposed to linger, and soon she was looking across to Robert and saying that Ellen was hoping to see them. He took the hint at once; but he noted that when Anna was making ready she went out of the room with

Jane, and that they were away together for longer than might have been expected. But neither of them offered any comment, and he had to be content with noting that their voices seemed friendly when they came back.

Anna was silent as they walked unhurriedly to Cumberland House. He was hoping to hear what she thought of Jane, and he waited, thinking that she might be sorting out her impressions. Then, as she still kept silence, he asked her outright.

'Jane?' She had obviously come out of her thoughts to answer him. 'I don't see any trouble. She's straightforward. You know where you are with her.'

'Good.' He was watching her carefully. 'You seem thought-

ful?'

'There's cause for it, isn't there? Did I get a fair impression of him?'

'Who? Joe?'

'Of course. He talked quite a lot, but I wondered if it was his usual talk, or something he put on for me.'

'Oh, no. That was just Joe.'

'Well, if you're going into partnership with him, you'll have to be careful.'

'Yes.' He answered her shortly, knowing very well what she meant. 'I'm not saying that Joe's notions are the same as mine.'

'I hope not.'

'You know it very well. All the same, if I'm to make a start at all, it'll have to be with Joe. I must have some backing from someone.'

'That's for you to say, of course. But you'll have to look out.'

'I know that.'

'I didn't, until tonight.'

She sounded terse, and at the door of Cumberland House she turned to face him, with her hand on the doorknob.

'Robert, you don't think I'm interfering, do you?'

'Of course not. But are you saying I oughtn't to join with Joe?'

'I'm saying nothing whatever of the sort.'

'You seem to disapprove.'

'There's no question of disapproving. I can see the necessity. I've only said that you'll have to look out. But I'm glad I've met Joe.'

There was no more said about it that night, and on the Monday night Robert went to see Jane again. She guessed his pur-

pose at once, and she as good as told Joe that he could now go out for a drink. Joe disappeared, and Robert looked inquiringly at his sister.

'You might have done worse,' she said. 'And don't look at me as if I don't know what you've come for. You're doing well if you think you can manage her. Do you think you can?'

'We get on very well.'

'There's a bit more to it than that. There was more done for her when she was young than you and I ever had. You can tell it by her talk.'

'She spends her time as the family's poor relation.'

'But she might want more when she's wed.'

'I think she deserves more.'

'As long as you think you can give it. But you can't wed Nick England's sister while you're his clerk, so what are you going to do?'

'Find something else.'

'I know what you're thinking of. Joe's thinking it too, isn't he?'

'Yes.'

'Well, there's nothing I can tell you. You're not a fool with men. It's just the girls I don't trust you with.'

'But Anna?'

'You'll be all right if you can do it. Do you think she'll have you?'

'Don't ask me that yet. It's too early.'

'Well, you'll have to see what she says. If she doesn't say it one time, she might another.'

'I suppose that does happen.'

'You ask Joe. Have you taken her to see Mother yet?'

'Of course I haven't. It's much too soon.'

'Aye, perhaps you're right.' Jane's grim smile appeared for a moment. 'When you do take her, just remember that it's not just Mother looking at her. She'll be looking at Mother.'

'But Jane, you don't say---'

'I'm not saying anything. But when a mother looks at a daughter-in-law, she always thinks the girl's not good enough. And when a girl looks at her mother-in-law she wonders how the heck she's going to manage, and between the two o' them there can be a bit of trouble.'

'You're not helpful.'

'I'm telling you. Someone has to. Now don't ask so many questions, or you won't get a cup of tea.'

Jane had evidently no more to say about it, and he had to let the matter drop. But later that week he learned a little more. He was now making a point of going into the Hole i' th' Wall at least once a week, partly to hear the gossip and partly to keep his membership of the useful circle there. He went in on the Wednesday evening, and Joe was sitting disconsolately in a corner. Robert promptly joined him.

'Have a pint?' said Joe.

'Thanks. Who's with Jane?'

'That lass o' yours. They must have fixed it up last Saturday. Jane was expecting her, and they didn't want me. They said I needn't be back too soon, and they were talking baby clothes before I left.'

'Well, I suppose Anna must know a bit about that. But I've been wanting a word with you.'

'What about?'

'Business.' He paused, and he noted the quick stir of interest the word had roused in Joe. 'Are we agreed that we're to join together to run some power-looms, by and by?'

'I've always said you're the lad for me.'

'When do we start?'

'When it looks safe.'

"There'll be a lot of men putting looms in then, won't there?"
"About half the town."

'It's to be secondhand looms, I suppose?'

'Of course it is. You can buy 'em pretty cheap, if you pick your moment.'

'And when the place looks safe, and half the town's rushing to buy them, what's going to happen to prices? Is that what you call picking your moment?'

'Hey, what's this?'

'Is that the moment to buy looms?'

'Well, I'm damned!' Joe's eyed had widened suddenly. 'What are you thinking?'

Robert chose words carefully, telling him of what had, in fact, been Anna's thinking. He developed all the arguments she had used to him over the supper table at the Nelson, and he was able to do it with conviction. He had considered it carefully since then, and he had made these thoughts his own.

'You're right,' said Joe, when he at last came to the end. 'I must be turnin' soft.'

'Well, never mind that. What are we going to do?'

'We're going to have another pint. I'm wondering where you're going to fetch up, if you go on thinking like this.'

'Let's keep to the point. How about these looms?'

'Who's going to pay for them?'

'Exactly.' They were looking at each other very straightly now. 'What have you in mind for this partnership?'

'Fifty-fifty's the best. You've the same risk then, and the same everything. Saves quarrels.'

'Are you thinking of managing the weaving shed?'

'Of course I'm not.'

'Then it won't be fifty-fifty. What'll it cost to get looms and things?'

'Three or four hundred?'

'That's about my guess too. Very well, then. A third from me, two-thirds from you.'

'Now, steady!'

'That's about usual, when one partner does the work.'

'Well, it might be, or it might not.' Joe sounded a little disgruntled now. 'What about the profits?'

'Two to me, one to you.'

'Hey?' Joe sat up suddenly. 'If you get any dam' sharper you'll cut yourself.'

'I'm to be paid for my work. One third of the profit for my third of the capital. Another third for the work I do. It's perfectly fair.'

'Now wait a minute. It's my factory, and I'm to find space for looms, just when I can do with space for gas fittings. Well, I'm to be paid for *that*.'

They argued it for a full hour or more, the gap slowly lessening between their demands, before they settled that the profits should be divided three to two between them, which seemed a fair compromise, and perhaps as good as either of them had hoped to get. Then Joe sat back and called for more beer.

'We'll have to wet it,' he said. 'But it's nice to have it fixed. What happens if we break partnership sometime? What about the looms and so on?'

'Fifty-fifty, I should think.'

'Not on your life, if I've bought two-thirds of 'em.'

'Well, we'll have to see Bolton or somebody, to get an agreement drawn. Let's ask him what's usual.'

'As long as he says what's fair. But not just now. It's half-past nine, and I'd better be getting home. You'll keep your mouth shut about this, won't you?'

'I'll have to tell Nick England.'

'You don't think he'll make trouble?'

'He'll make less trouble if he's told than if he finds out.'

'Aye, perhaps you're right. Now, let's be going, and if Anna's still with Jane, you can take her home.'

They walked down Church Street together and a few minutes later Anna was walking up the hill with Robert. It was all but dark now, and he found it hard to see her face.

'You've had a pleasant evening?' he asked.

'Useful.' He heard the soft laugh at his side. 'I've quite a lot of experience of some things that Jane hasn't—yet. So I'm useful to talk with. We needn't go into details.'

'Of course not.' Again he found himself glancing at her, wishing that he could see her face more clearly. 'But I've been having a talk with Joe.'

He explained it as briefly as he could, and she heard him in complete silence. It lasted till they were at Cumberland House, and she paused at the door.

'Of course, I'll have to tell your brother,' he said.

'Yes, you must do that.' She spoke as if her thoughts were with some other part of it. 'Robert, are you happy about this?' 'Of course.'

He spoke sharply, and stopped even more sharply. He had been so pleased at coming to terms with Joe, and so excited that partnership seemed at last within his reach, that he had fogotten that there was another side to this. Now, at her sober question, it all came back to him, and he had to change that hasty answer.

'I mean,' he said carefully, 'that I'm satisfied for the moment. It's the only way open to me, and I'll have to leave later troubles till they come.'

'Yes.' She spoke quickly, as if she accepted this. 'Please don't think I'm speaking against it. I'm only looking ahead.'

'That must wait till it comes.'

'Very well.' Again her tone changed quickly. 'I'm so pleased. And I do hope it works very well for you.'

'I think it might.' The thought of all it might mean came

suddenly back to him, and excitement gripped him. 'But Anna, if it does—if it all works well——'

'It could make a big difference to you.'

'Couldn't it make a difference to you? I've never thought of this for myself alone.' He saw her turn a little away from him, and suddenly his hands were on her arms, turning her to face him again. 'Anna, you know what I mean. You couldn't help knowing, after all this time.'

'I'm not sure that I understand. I'm not sure even that I ought to understand—just yet.' She was standing quite still, and very close to him, but there was a cool precision in her tone. 'These are early days.'

'I know. But----'

'Early days.' She sounded pleasantly friendly as she cut him short. 'It will be next year, won't it, before anything happens?' 'Oh yes. But——'

'That's a long time ahead. And at this moment, don't you think you've put it rather well yourself?'

'How?'

'You seem satisfied with the look of things. I think you could let it go at that.'

'Anna, I---'

'Ellen will certainly be wondering where I am.' Her head tilted suddenly. 'I'm not quite sure about it myself, now. Good night!'

23

IMPATIENCE

From that moment affairs began to get out of hand. The thought of Anna deepened Robert's impatience. He remembered her views about men who waited till all was safe, and he may have let Joe see that he was impatient. They went to

Harry Bolton. They explained the terms they had agreed on, and they asked for advice in the further details. Bolton gave it; and one result was a proviso that if the partnership should be dissolved in less than three years, two-thirds of the assets should go to Joe, who was to supply two-thirds of the first capital; after three years there was to be equal division. It seemed reasonable; and Robert did not pause to think that what related to the fourth year of a partnership with Joe might not be of much practical use.

It was mid-August when the agreement was signed, and it could not be kept entirely a secret. Nicholas had to be told

about it, and he showed no surprise.

'I've seen it coming,' he said briefly. 'I hope it works well for you. I took my own chance to set up, so I can't say much when someone else does it. I suppose you know Joe?'

'Pretty well, I think.'

'You'll need to. Well, give me some warning when you think of leaving me. Have you told Anna?'

'I've told you first.'

'Thanks.' It was as brief as before, and only the brightness of his eyes showed that Nicholas had seen the point. 'But tell the lass. She'll be interested.'

Anna was certainly interested, but she did not take it lightly. Some undercurrents seemed to run in her thoughts.

'It should be all right,' she said. 'I'm sure it's an oppor-

tunity. But are you telling John about this?'

It was a sudden shift of topic, but he had little difficulty in deciding that John should be told. John's comments were apt to be useful, and he might be sufficiently outside the dust of the town to see this clearly. It was still the custom for both Robert and Anna to go to Greenfield on a Friday evening, and that seemed an obvious moment.

Before Friday came, however, there was another comment. The news had somehow slipped into the discreet channels by which gossip went to the select circle; and on Wednesday evening, when Robert was paying his weekly visit to the Hole i' th' Wall, he found himself in a quiet corner with Barnard Crook, who asked him bluntly if the tale was true. Robert admitted that it was.

'I'll wish you luck. Do you like your partner?'

It came quietly, in the same matter-of-fact tone, and for a moment Robert sat very still. Everyone, he thought, seemed to harp on this. It was the first point that occurred to them all. 'We get on fairly well,' he said.

'That wasn't quite what I meant.' There was a slight pause, which seemed to give tang to the comment. 'What I was going to say is that Joe isn't as clever as you might think.'

There was another pause. Crook was in no hurry, and Robert sat waiting. He had known Crook for some time now as a sensible and kindly man who never pushed himself into a talk and seldom made comments. But this sounded something new.

'Aye,' said Crook slowly. 'Do you remember that night last year when you rode out to Wanless, and Nick England came? I thought then you might be starting for yourself one day. I told you you'd have to learn to buy cheap. Do you remember?'

'Yes.'

'I'm saying it again now. If you want your business to last, you must do it that way. Buying cheap, not selling dear. Do you see?'

'I think so.'

'You'd better. Because it's what Joe has never learnt yet. He's just that bit too greedy, and you can smash any business that way, in the end of things. It isn't worth while to think your customer's always a fool, because he sometimes isn't, and that's what Joe can't see. Do you follow that?'

'Not quite, perhaps.'

'Trade goes in ups and downs. But say there's a good year, when everybody's trying to buy. Prices go up, and if you've been selling cheap before, you can sell moderate now, and there's no harm in that.'

'Quite so.'

'But suppose you pile the price on, like Joe. Your customer must pay, but he'll remember it. And what's he going to do when a bad year comes, and there are twenty men trying to sell to him? Do you think he'll buy from you?' Again Crook waited as if he would let this sink home. Then he spoke more slowly. 'If you treat your man fair, he'll stay with you all years. But Joe doesn't know it. Joe's a quick-profit man, and that's not the same as steady trade. I suppose you know he doesn't do too well out of his ironwork?'

'No.' There was surprise in the answer now. 'I'd have thought he had a first-rate business.'

'Then you're wrong. Of course, he's busy enough just now,

with all this gas stuff, but there are too many folk who think they won't get value if they deal with Joe, and I'm one of 'em. He's had that place at Colne Lane for about three years now, and he's not using half of it. You didn't think he was doing you a favour, did you, by letting you put looms in the place? It'll be a godsend to him.'

'I see.'

'Mind you, I'm not saying Joe's in trouble. He isn't. He's been after quick profits for a long time past, and he's done very well out of it. It's just the iron trade that's falling off, and he might sell out of it at any time. He'll have the gas profits, and then he might set up in some other line.'

'What sort of line?'

'It might be cotton, if he can get someone to teach him.' Crook drained the last of his modest half-pint and slapped the mug on the table. 'It takes all sorts to make a world, and that's Joe's sort. Good night!'

Robert went out to Greenfield with Anna on the Friday night and he at once told John about the agreement with Joe. Then he added, with no show of emphasis, that Crook had dropped a hint about Joe's habit of selling dear. To his surprise, John swept that aside as unimportant.

'If I were you, I'd leave that till you come to it. Who will do

the buying and selling? You or Joe?'

'I shall. I've learned quite a lot about markets in the last year or so.'

'But you'll be selling cloth, won't you, and lately you've been selling yarn? Surely it's not the same market?'

'Well, no.'

Robert spoke slowly, and he was feeling uncommonly stupid. The point, of course, was perfectly obvious. The two markets were quite different, but by some odd blindness he had overlooked it. So, perhaps, had Joe, who had been insistent that to work for Nicholas was the way to learn the markets. But the market for yarn was *not* the market for cloth.

'Where is cloth sold?' asked John.

'In Manchester, mostly.'

'Do you know any Manchester men?'

'No. It's about the one place I don't go to. Bradley always does that.'

'Then perhaps you'd better have a talk with him. Now how

about this factory of Hoyle's? There's no water, I suppose, to drive a wheel.'

'Oh, no, but there's an engine and boiler there. The place was once used for spinning, you know. We shall have to overhaul it because it hasn't been used for quite a while, but we couldn't possibly have afforded a new one.'

'They are rather expensive. I'm finding that.'

'Oh?' Robert spoke with a sudden new interest. 'Have you decided on one?'

'They're starting the work next week. I want to have the engine before there's ice on the wheel again.'

'I hope I'll hear it puffing when I come back,' said Anna.

'Oh?' Robert turned quickly to her. 'Does that mean you know when you're coming back?'

'Susan has asked me to be back in January.'

There was a careful lack of expression in her tone that would have given anybody the hint, and the matter was soon disclosed more precisely. Susan was expecting another child, who might perhaps be born in February, and she had no doubt this time that Anna, and nobody else, must take charge of the house at that time. Anna had therefore been asked to come, and John had said that she might as well be with them for Christmas. This, however, Anna had not promised.

'I suspect her deeply,' said John. 'She's hoping that Nick and Ellen will ask her. She'd like Christmas with them.'

'No,' said Anna. 'Though, of course, it is a little difficult for me to come here and not spend a few days with Ellen.'

'At any rate, Anna, we shall be glad to see you whenever you can come. I expect Robert will be, too.'

That went without saying, but this news that she would be back in January worked upon him like a ferment. Already his thoughts were leaping ahead, asking if she need ever leave again when her work for Susan should be done. That would be March or April. There would be all of a winter in between; and already, in his excited thoughts, the firm of Shaw & Hoyle was established on more than paper. It was at work in the factory, its engine puffing and its looms clacking while the woven cloth was loaded into wagons for the markets he would have found in Manchester. The profits would be dividing, three to himself and two to Joe, and he would be a man rising in the world; a man who could surely say to Anna that she must now marry him, and end for ever these comings and goings.

He was in no mood now for another year or two of waiting, while Anna came and went.

He tried to tell her so, as they walked back to Cumberland House, but he had perhaps shown his impatience too plainly. Anna was worried, and she took no pains to hide it.

'Of course I understand,' she told him. 'I'll be very glad to see you getting something that satisfies. But that isn't an excuse for being silly.'

'Anna!'

'Well, I'm sorry if I've said the wrong word. Of course, I know you aren't silly, really. I don't think I know anyone who's less so. All the same, I don't like the look of it.'

'Look of what?'

'Everything. You've a partner who might behave any way. Then you've all these handloom men, and you say yourself they won't be safe if they see power-looms. On top of it all, you have this Chartist trouble, and there isn't a soldier in the town. Is it the moment to be in a hurry?'

'It's the moment to do things cheaply. You told me that yourself.'
'And I'm beginning to wish I hadn't. I don't know what I've

set you into. I oughtn't to have interfered.'

'You didn't interfere. It was a very good suggestion, and I

was very glad of it.'

'Well, you won't be, if you put all your money into looms, and have them wrecked in the first week. I'd be a lot happier if you didn't seem in such a hurry.'

'I don't think I'm in a hurry. Not beyond what's necessary.'
'You were talking just now of being established by March.'

'Yes, and I mean to be. You know why.'

'No, I don't.'

'Anna, you can't keep coming and going like this, never knowing where you're going next, or when you're coming back. It's all wrong.'

'It may be. But it hasn't anything to do with the moment to start a business. That's asking for trouble, and you know it.'

'You seem to speak as if I'm completely reckless.'

'I don't think you're being as prudent as you might be.'

'I thought we had agreed that too much prudence can miss the moment. You as good as said so.'

'I expect I did. But you have to pick a moment by looking at the town and the trade and the Chartists. You must *not* pick it by looking at me. That's what I'm telling you.'

He stayed for a moment in an almost sullen silence, knowing that this was true and that she was talking better sense than he. In the same silence they walked the last few yards, and it was Anna who spoke first.

'You won't think I'm ungrateful?' she said. 'Or that I don't appreciate that you've been thinking very kindly about me?

But I am thinking of you.'

'Yes.' He stopped as they came to the door of Cumberland House. 'But, Anna, whatever it is, you do know what I want?' 'What?'

'You.'

He came out with it bluntly, hardly intending to say it, yet suddenly happier that he had put it into one plain word at last. He stood waiting, and he saw that she was looking away. Then, quite slowly, she lifted her eyes to his.

'You make it a little difficult for me. It's too soon. And perhaps you don't know me very well yet. Perhaps not as well

as you think.'

'Well enough to---'

'It's too soon.' She stopped him as firmly as before. 'There's a lot of water to come down the river yet.'

'It can't be too soon for you to say---'

'No.' There was a tap on his arm to emphasize it. 'It's a question of the right moment, and this isn't it.'

'You're leaving me without any---'

'Robert!' The tap came again, more forcibly now. 'If you can't make sense of all that I've said and done, you must be a fainter heart that I thought you were.'

'Anna! Do you mean that in the end you'll-

'I don't mean anything at all, except what I've said. I keep

telling you I don't.'

She opened the door, and there was nothing for it but to follow her. In the dimly lighted hall she seemed to hesitate. Then she stopped and turned.

'You'll have to use your wits,' she said. 'In more affairs

than one.'

He was close against her, and he caught the fragrance of a scent she had used. She waited for him, not moving, and her eyes were very bright and clear. Something seemed to be dancing in them now; and suddenly, before he had thought or knew what he was doing, he had her in his arms and had kissed her. All the inward force of him, which he had held back for

so long, seemed to be surging upward for that brief moment, and he was crude and strong about it, caring nothing whether he hurt her or not, nor what anyone might think or say. It lasted the few short seconds, long and incredible to him, and then, as suddenly as it had gone, his upbringing returned. A chaos of thoughts rushed at him, shouting that he ought not to have done it. His arms fell limp, releasing her, and she stepped back. He could see her breath coming quickly, and he waited for her words. Then her head tilted.

'I seem to have been wrong,' she said calmly. 'You're not.'
'Not what?'

His voice sounded strange. Her head tilted just a little more, then came erect again.

'More faint hearted than I thought you were.'

She looked him calmly in the eye her face quite solemn, while he stared at her unbelieving. His bemused wits were still trying to put it together when he saw the twitch of her forehead. She turned abruptly.

'Come along,' she said. 'Ellen and the Twankay tea. I'm beginning to need it.'

He followed her quickly across the hall, but she did not let him overtake her. At the foot of the stairs she turned again.

'I'll tell you something else,' she whispered.

'Yes?'

'You're not very good at it. You haven't had much practice.'

24

POWER-LOOMS

Anna went away the following week, which was the last in August, and Robert's feelings of loneliness swelled to a determination, more urgent than before, that he must have the means to ask her to stay with him always; which simply meant

that he must be established in his business, and Shaw & Hoyle must be a running firm. There could be nothing lost by having all ready, so that he could watch for the prudent moment. He said that firmly to himself, and he knew that it was not true. He knew well enough that once all was ready he would find a moment somehow. Anna was to return in January.

He began to argue that affairs should now be put in hand, the looms bought, the floor space cleared, and the engine overhauled. Joe did not exactly refuse, but he made excuses. He was too busy just now; he needed the floor space; prices of looms would fall still further in the winter. Robert disposed of these, and Joe looked baffled. Then he said that he could not just now leave Jane and go to Manchester buying looms. Jane was coming near her time. Her child was expected at about the end of the month, and he was more concerned with that than with second-hand looms. Robert said that he would himself buythelourns, and all he needed was Joe's two-thirds of the cost and a list of the men Joe knew who dealt in looms. There were some more words before Joe produced fifty pounds, which, with half as much from Robert, would be enough to begin with. Then he was asked for the list of names, and he at once became so evasive that Robert began to wonder if he really knew anybody who dealt in looms. Joe said it was a poor thing if his brother-in-law couldn't trust him, and then he made a list of five names. Robert promptly took it to Dick Bradley, who was a Manchester man, and Dick made short work of it. Four of the men were of no importance, and the fifth was an insolvent broker of bad repute. It looked very much, said Dick, as if Joe knew nothing about it.

'I'll believe you,' said Robert. 'But if I'm to buy these looms, where do I start? Do you know anyone in that trade?'

'No. I know men who might know other men, so to speak, but I can't give you names direct. Why not ask Nick?'

It seemed a good suggestion, and Robert wasted no time about it. He thought it wise to tell the whole story, and Nicholas listened attentively. When it ended his forehead had a crinkle that would have reminded anyone of Anna. There was even a slight tilt of his head.

'In a hurry, aren't you?' was his comment. 'When do you want to start this firm?'

'Early next year.'

'About the time Anna comes back?'

There was a moment of silence. Nicholas sat back comfortably, and Robert felt himself reddening. He waited awkwardly.

'I was just guessing,' said Nicholas.

'You probably guessed right.'

'That's how I keep in business. You'll be surprised how often running a business just means guessing right. Of course I did think you looked a bit sweet on Anna, and I suppose this is mixed up with it?'

'Why not?' Robert answered boldly now, sure that he must face this out. 'But you're her brother. Would you disapprove

of me?'

'I'm not her keeper, and she'll go her own way. She always does. You may think she's going your way and you wake up six months later and find it wasn't your way after all.'

'But I'm still asking whether you disapprove?'

'Me?' For an instant it sounded sardonic, but his eyes were steady, and suddenly a faint smile came to him. 'For what it's worth, I'll wish you luck—if she decides to have you. You're about the tenth who's been after her, and she sniffed at the other nine like a cat who doesn't think his dinner's good. Then she turned up her nose and went on walking. She's nearly driven some of her family mad.'

'Why?'

'Too dam' fastidious. She's a good lass, though, if you can get the trick of her.'

'I hope I can.'

'Well, the other nine didn't. Now what's this about looms? What do you want from me?'

The change of tone was emphatic, and Robert responded to it at once.

'I want time to go to Manchester, and any names you can give me of men who might deal in power-looms.'

'You can have the time, but I can't give you the names not for second-hand ones. I suppose you're sure you ought to go yourself?'

'Well. Joe doesn't seem much use.'

'Of course he isn't.'

'Then why can't he say so?'

'Because he wants you to think you can't do without him. That's Joe's way. But if I wanted looms from Manchester I'd send Dick. He knows as much about looms as you do, and a lot more about Manchester.'

'But buying these looms cheap is very important to us. It, could make all the difference.'

'Some of the things Dick does for me are important. Now I'll tell you something.' There was a sudden rap on the table to give emphasis. 'Don't try to do everything for yourself when you're running a business. If you have to do it all yourself it means you've picked your men badly, and you'd better get rid of one or two. Dick will be there next week for me, and he can do your work too. Do you remember working for the Gas affair, making that report?'

'Yes?'

'You said you oughtn't to work for nothing, and Dick can say the same. He's entitled to his fee, and he'll like it better if he doesn't have to ask for it.'

'Oh-er-thanks.'

'I'm trying to help you. Now if that's all, go and tell Dick.'
Robert made for the door, and he was half-way out when
Nicholas called him back.

'What's the price of power-looms-new ones?'

'I don't really know.'

'Well, if you're trying to buy second-hand without knowing the price of new, you're not running your business very well.' He paused for a moment to let that sink in. 'You can buy them new for about twenty shillings each, and I wouldn't pay more than fifteen for a second-hand one—and not that, unless it looked like new.'

'Thanks. I'll tell Dick.'

'He probably knows it already.'

Dick seemed pleased to be asked, and even more pleased when the matter of a fee was mentioned. Then he let it out that he had an eye on a girl in Manchester, whom he had known when he lived there and had recently met again. He was therefore trying to save what money he could; and Robert, very sympathetic with this, was more pleased than ever that Nicholas had suggested what seemed to be working so well.

Dick went off to Manchester the following week, and he was back three days later, looking well satisfied. For Nicholas he had sold as much yarn as could be expected, and for Shaw & Hoyle he had bought seventy-six second-hand power looms, all of them as good as new, for thirteen shillings each. They could be delivered as soon as they were paid for, and he had arranged for them to come suitably wrapped, so that the sight

of the packages should not excite the handloom men. There were no more at the moment, but they could be had from time to time, if Robert was not in a hurry. Robert was; but he had sense enough to know that this was a price worth waiting for. Three hundred looms were needed to fill the factory, and there would be a good deal saved if Dick could buy the rest as cheaply.

Robert went off to report to Joe, who was not much interested. It was mid-September now. Mary Ann had come from Trawden to see to the house and Jane, and Joe found her so prickly that his talk was all of domestic miseries. Nor was Nicholas much interested. He had something else in his head. In the last days of September he came into the counting-house one sunlit morning with the *Manchester Times* once more. They read it dutifully, and it seemed of only moderate interest. Seven men, meeting in the York hotel in Manchester, had agreed to set up an Anti-Corn-Law Association. They had announced that they would meet again and that subscriptions would be welcomed. That seemed all, and they looked inquiringly at Nicholas.

'What's the price of wheat?' he asked.

'Seventy-two shillings a quarter,' said Dick. 'And it will go higher yet.'

'There's plenty of corn abroad, if it could only come in cheap. Why can't it?'

'I've told you before. It's dear corn so that the farmer can pay a dear rent.'

'I'm beginning to think you're right. It's the landlords, not the farmers, we've to get at.' He rapped his fingers sharply on the newspaper. 'That's what this is for.'

He went off into an explanation. There was no out-at-elbows Chartist nonsense here, he said. These were men of brains, cotton men and manufacturers, and they would know how to make themselves heard.

'Aye, they'll make a noise,' said Dick, 'but it won't be just yet. In the meantime, look at this.'

He was pointing to another report, and its headline was ominous. It was the tale of a Chartist meeting, a wild huge monster of a meeting, held outside Manchester on Kersal moor, on the very day that had seen the meeting at the York hotel about the corn laws. A hundred thousand people had gathered and the principal speaker had been a Rev. Mr. Stephens. The

Charter, this man had shouted, was a knife-and-fork affair, not ballots but bread, and the people would answer force with force. There was more in the same strain, and Nicholas turned suddenly to ask who the man might be.

'Stephens?' Dick seemed surprised that the question should be asked. 'He's from Ashton, near Manchester. He's been bawling like this for some time past. He's a Methodist, or at least he used to be, but I'm told they threw him out. He's all for knives and blood, and he'll have someone hanged, one of these days.'

'Why not himself?'

'Because it's usually the wrong man who finds the trouble.' He was looking steadily at Nicholas now. 'In one way and another there's going to be a lot of trouble. Even here the men have been told to elect their delegates to this Convention. There's a committee of Chartists to make arrangements, and they're keeping very quiet about it. I think they mean to spring a surprise.'

Perhaps they did, but for the moment all seemed normal. There was seething talk, but nothing more. The wagons of cotton still rumbled through the streets from Wanless to the mills, and the loads of finished varn were still despatched each week to any buyer who would pay. Down in Waterside, below St. Helen's mill, the foundations of the gasworks had been finished and the buildings were rising rapidly. Up in Colne Lane, and in all the major streets, gangs of men were prising up the stones and digging the trenches for the gas pipes; and from Joe Hoyle's factory came the clang of hammers and the rasp of files to show how busy he was, making ready for the gas. Nicholas said that only the gas was keeping the peace in the town, by the wages it was paying; and there was at least no doubt that discontent would have been vastly worse without it. It was temporary work, but it had come at the right moment. Even the Justices were thankful, but they had worries enough in spite of it. From everywhere reports were coming in of speeches and meetings and elections of delegates. O'Connor was wild and inflammatory, and his Northern Star printed his speeches in lavish detail, working their further harm on men who had never heard his voice. Discreetly, and without any noise or fuss, the government was moving troops to the North, and another uniform was seen in Burnley now. The 10th Regiment had reinforced the garrison there, and it was said that

Harry Bolton and the Justices lost no time in going to see their colonel.

In the Colne Lane factory there was another activity, hidden by the noise of files and hammers, and not much noticed by anyone. Joe had at last agreed to have something done about the steam engine and the boiler. Both needed overhaul, and Robert had been insisting that this was the time for it. He wrote on Joe's behalf to the firm that had made the engine, and two of their men were soon at the factory. Then, at Robert's insistence, Joe began to talk of the way his business was growing, and of a chance that he would have to use power for some of his operations soon. It gave a pretext for the firing of the boiler and the testing of the engine, which would have led to a flood of talk if a reason had not been given.

Then a spate of packages began to come to the factory, all addressed to Joe, and in them were the seventy-six looms that Dick had bought in Manchester. They were not an immediate difficulty, for in these days of gas fittings so many odd-looking packages arrived for Joe that nobody was surprised by a few more. All he had to do was to have them put behind locked doors on the empty upper floor, and then give it out that they were gas fittings awaiting use. Then he left it to Robert to open the packages and check the contents. Dick gave generously of his time to help. Joe did nothing at all; and all that could be done was to hope that when Jane was in health again he would make a better partner.

Jane, however, was also doing nothing at the moment. Mary Ann, who was as tired of Joe as he was of her, confided to Robert that she had had enough of working in someone else's kitchen, and the sooner Jane obliged the better. Robert, who did not always see eye to eye with Mary Ann, found himself for once in agreement with her; he had noticed that, whatever Mary Ann did, Jane seemed to want it done differently.

He turned attention to another problem. Handloom men were perhaps not suited to power-looms. They had learned the skills of one trade, and most of them were too set in their ways to learn another. The tenting of power-looms might therefore be done better by women and girls, who could come to it without set notions. Also, they would be cheaper. But they would know nothing of power-looms, and he would have to teach them the work; which made him think he had better learn it himself. He discussed this with Dick, whose knowledge of

power-looms was as vague as his own, and then the two of them set to work. In the privacy of that upper storey they invented a contraption by which a power-loom could be driven by a handcrank. Then with the help of a book that Dick had bought in Manchester, they tried to get the warp and weft fitted to the loom for weaving. But setting up a loom was a lot more difficult than they had thought, and the more they read the book the less sense they seemed to find. They had to admit defeat, and it was Dick, in the end, who said they had better have a word with Nicholas. There were not many points in the trade, he declared, on which Old Nick could not say something useful.

Nicholas told them what anyone else in the town would have known, that even a handloom weaver did not set up his own loom. Setting up the threads was a job for a specialist who was called a loomer, and this was even more so with power-looms. They differed from handlooms mainly in the different shapes of things, but there was no fundamental difference, and a loomer would puzzle them out in a day or two if he had any brains.

'Oh!' said Robert, who was finding this a setback. 'Where do we get a loomer?'

'You'll find a hundred or so in the town, mostly out of work.'

'From the handlooms? But---'

'Awkward, isn't it?'

Nicholas sounded cheerful, and Robert stood thinking it out. To engage a loomer to work on a power-loom would be to give the secret away at once, and trouble would quickly follow. The handloom men knew very well what the power-looms meant.

'You'll need a loomer,' said Nicholas again. 'You need one now, if you're going to set your looms up. You can't have a local man, so he'll have to be an offcomer.'

'Oh ho!' said Dick softly. 'Blackburn, do you mean?'

'Not from Blackburn. You can't bring the man here as a loomer, or they'll pitch him in the river. You'll have to call him something else, and that's why Blackburn won't do. It's too close. There might be someone here who just happened to know the chap.'

'Where from, then?'

'Farther off. Let Dick find someone for you. Are you still talking of starting in March?'

'Yes.'

'Then get a good man and keep him. You'll have to pay him through the winter. Now listen——' Nicholas was suddenly incisive. 'You can run this place, if you want to, with women and girls. They'll be cheap. But the cheaper they are, the better your three chief men will have to be, and that's your head loomer, your tackler, and your engine tenter. They'll have to be good, so pick 'em good from the outset.'

'But I don't want them yet.'

'You want your loomer. He'll have to stay sober and keep his mouth shut, as well as knowing his work, and you won't get that sort of man unless you offer him something. What you want is a young chap, who wants to get on in the world, and if he's offered head loomer in a new factory when he's about twenty-six he'll probably come. He might stay with you for the rest of his life, and that's the sort of man you want. That's how I got Sam Hartley, and you see for yourself what he's growing into. Do you mind my telling you how to run your business?'

'I'm glad of your advice. But I'm wondering whether I can

afford this one.'

'You'll have to, and I'm not saying it will be cheap. Loomers come at the top of the weaving trade, and you'll have to pay a good wage. It might be fifteen shillings a week. Sixteen, perhaps, if he's good, but that doesn't matter if he's worth it.'

'It's a lot of money, though.'

Robert spoke reluctantly, knowing that money was tight, and that a wage like that, paid through the winter, would drain their resources badly; yet knowing also that Nicholas had given sound advice. A loomer was certainly needed; and to be sure how to work the looms was essential knowledge, which would have to be paid for.

'I'll need a word with Joe,' he said slowly.

But Joe was not having that sort of word with anybody at this moment. Jane gave birth to a daughter that afternoon, and Joe was not thinking about loomers.

THE CHARTISTS

IT DIVERTED Robert's attention also. A delighted Joe was in the Hole i' th' Wall, and Mary Ann sat in Jane's particular chair and looked as if she owned the house and Robert too. Jane, she told him, was doing as well as anybody could expect, and so was the child. She added that if she wanted his help she would let him know; and he retorted that she could keep her breath for her porridge. There were moments when Mary Ann had to be put down. He had no doubt that she was pleased at the affair, but she almost looked as if she had done it all herself.

He went off to the Hole i' th' Wall in the hope that he might now have that word with Joe, and he soon found that he was wrong. Joe was in no mood for talk about a loomer's pay, and he was soon in no state for it either. He was at the centre of everything, standing drinks to everyone who came in, and the place was ribald and noisy, with bursts of laughter and jests of an obvious sort. Robert was hailed with shouts of welcome, and he had to make the best of it while he spoke congratulations and drank the beer that was thrust upon him. Then he made his escape as quickly as he could, and he thought that Joe was hardly aware of it. But he still wanted that word about the loomer.

As things fell out, he had it the next night, and he was later to wonder if he had been wise to do so. Joe was able to complain afterwards that he had never understood the matter and would not have agreed to it if he had. But Robert, not for the first time lately, had been in a hurry.

He had begun the evening by calling to inquire after Jane. Mary Ann, not in the best of tempers, said that Jane was doing as well as you could expect after an uproar in the night. Joe, she said, had come in at half past one in the morning. He had not been noisy in himself, but he had kicked up a deal of noise by his collisions with the furniture. Mary Ann, however, had not lived for twenty years in Trawden without learning how to deal with a drunk, and there had been nothing difficult about this one. He obviously wanted his bed, so she had tumbled

him into it, tugged off his boots and pulled his stock open. Then she threw a blanket over him and left him, and he had slept heavily till ten o'clock. He had stumbled out about noon, come in again for a word with Jane, and he was now in the Hole i' th' Wall; having, as Mary Ann remarked, a hair of the dog that bit him. But Jane was doing well, the child seemed healthy, and everyone was satisfied. Susie had come from Trawden this morning, and had stayed only a half-hour before taking the news home. Everything, in short, was in good order, except, perhaps, Joe; and Mary Ann thought that Robert might perhaps see if he could be brought home at a decent hour tonight.

Robert went to the Hole i' th' Wall at once, and certainly Joe did not look himself. His colour was not right, and his eyes were without life. He was sitting alone in a corner, and he stared gloomily at Robert without much sign of recognition. Then he brightened, and he had something like his old tone as he called for another drink and asked what Robert would have. Almost at once he was surly again as he said he was fed up with Mary Ann. Then he changed once more as he said the child looked like taking after Jane. He seemed to be alternating between truculence and a pretence that he was all right, and Robert decided to come at once to the matter of the loomer. Joe heard the beginning of it, and then he seemed to lose patience.

'To hell with the loomer!' he said. 'What's it to do with me?'

'This is special. Now listen-

He tried to explain that the loomer would have to be brought from another town, and Joe seemed to have his mind wandering. Then, suddenly, it came back, and for a moment he was his old shrewd self.

'How about his reacher-in?' he asked sharply. 'Now don't say you don't know what he is?' The truculent tone was return-

ing. 'He sits at t'other side and reaches ends.'

There was a silence. Robert did at least know that when a loomer was setting the warp in a loom he needed the help of a lad called the reacher-in. He sat opposite the loomer, on the other side of the frame, picking up the ends of the warp in the proper sequence and holding them ready to be drawn through the healds by the looming hook. It was not particularly skilled work, though he certainly had to know which pair of ends to offer next, but every loomer needed his reacher-in; and one

moment of thought showed that the lad would also have to come from another town, or the secret would be out at once.

'What the hell's it to do with me?' said Joe suddenly. 'I'm not mucking round wi' t' reacher-in.'

'I'll see to the reacher-in. I just want you to agree-

'Well, I won't.' Joe thrust his face forward in a bellicose stare. 'You can do what you dam' well please, if you don't bother me. What are you drawing your money for?'

The truculent mood had evidently returned, and Robert stopped arguing. He had been told to do as he pleased, and that was enough. So he set himself to coaxing Joe home, which did not prove difficult. Joe merely wished to be in bed, and Robert made sure that he got there. In ten minutes he was asleep, and Mary Ann even spoke a word of thanks as Robert reached for his hat.

There were some consultations next morning with Nicholas who advised that if Dick could not find a loomer in Manchester he should go to Bolton, which was only ten miles away, and call on Mr. Knowles, the yarn merchant. He even furnished a letter of introduction. Then Dick went off, and Robert had no time to play with looms. He had Dick's work to do as well as his own, and he still thought it a duty to call each night on Jane, who was well enough now to see him. Then, on the Wednesday, his mother walked over from Trawden to see her first grandchild. She showed an interest in his doings, specially asking what friends he had made in Colne, so he told her of Dick Bradley, and at once she was pressing him to bring Dick to Trawden on his next visit. To save an argument he said he would.

On the Friday Dick was home again, and he explained that he had done what was asked of him. He had sold the yarn for Nicholas, and he had bought for Shaw & Hoyle another fifty-five looms. Then he had gone to Bolton and presented his letter to Mr. Knowles, who had been willing enough to oblige a friend. In ten minutes he had heard of three loomers out of jobs, and Tom Ogden was said to be the best of them. Knowles sent messengers out, and Dick talked with Tom Ogden an hour later. He was twenty-seven and had been a loomer for three years, but he had some ambitions, and he seemed very willing to move to another town if it offered him a proper job. Also, if he were to come to Colne, he could bring young Jack with him, who was his reacher-in and also in search of something better.

All in all, Dick said, it seemed worth a few shillings to take this further, and he had therefore given Ogden his coach-fare to come to Colne tomorrow, with the promise of the return fare also.

There was need for secrecy now, and Robert saw him in Joe's factory, where they were used to all sorts of men coming about gas fittings. Ogden, he thought, reminded him of Sam Hartley, a short thick-set man with wide shoulders and vivid eyes, looking a little ill at ease in what were plainly his Sunday clothes, but nevertheless sure of himself. He knew what he wanted and what he could offer. He wanted to be head loomer in a firm that was likely to grow in size, and he seemed willing in return to give any help he could, not keeping strictly to his work as a loomer. He said he could keep his mouth shut when he had to, and so could young Jack, the reacher-in. Then, to another question, he said he was not a tackler, but he knew a good bit about power-looms, and he thought he could do what was needed until a proper tackler was found.

Terms were arranged without much trouble. Tom Ogden was to have twelve shillings a week as a loomer through the winter, rising to fifteen shillings when the firm had opened. Young Jack was to have six shillings a week as the reacher-in, with the understanding that if he showed himself fit for the work he was to be promoted loomer when the firm began. These were generous wages, as Robert well knew, but he felt fairly sure he would have value for them. It did not occur to him to

ask what Joe would think.

A day or two later Jane had some news for him. The infant daughter, now flourishing noisily, was to be named Betsy, and with Joe calling himself a Baptist, and Jane something between that and an Inghamite, there could be no ceremony of christening. But there was still a need to let people know, so there would be a gathering in the house at which the friends and neighbours would be given tea and formally told of the child's name. Clearly, said Jane, their mother must be asked to this, and would Robert, as the eldest, go to Trawden with an invitation? He could hardly refuse, and he said he would go on Saturday, when the mill closed early. But he remembered his mother's wish that he should take Dick with him when next he went to Trawden. Dick looked pleased, and said at once that he would come.

It proved to be a damp grey Saturday, and a thin drizzle of

rain brought work to an end at half-past three. It was the old tale of lack of light, and Nicholas accepted it ruefully. He gave the order to shut down, and then he went strolling across the green to see how the gasworks was getting on. Robert looked critically at the sky and decided that the rain would ease. Then he and Dick began their walk on a rough and stony road that wound steeply upwards from the river. Anna had guided a gig down here one summer's day, while he walked behind with Fanny and Betsy, and now he and Dick were tramping up it in October rain. It brought them to the high wild plateau, a place of shaggy grass and sweeping wind, with the wet road cutting across it, bleak and lonely. Below them, across the valley, they could see the town as a patch of darker grey in the mist, a sign that the weather was clearing and might be fine for their return.

They were not expected at his mother's house, but that made no difference. Soon Robert was sitting by the fire with his mother, while Susie, who had been looking approvingly at Dick, lured him into talk as she saw to the tea. She found so much to talk about that the guests found it hard to get away, and it was nearly half past seven of the October night when they began their walk home. The sky had cleared and a faint few stars could be seen, but the night was damp and dark, with a thin mist rising. The dim lights in the village windows dropped below them as they climbed, and then they found a surprise. The high road across this upland should have been in blackness, lost in the dark and the curling mist, and it was not. Ahead of them a glare of light was seen, quavering and tinged with red.

'Torches,' said Dick. 'That's what it must be.'

He explained his meaning as they went. The Northern Star had been urging meetings everywhere to whip up support for the Charter. It had declared against the daylight of Sundays, arguing that the Sabbath must not be disturbed; but Dick suspected the true reason to be that a meeting by torchlight would have a touch of the theatrical about it, which might appeal to O'Connor.

The light was shining down the road from a hundred points, some white, some red, some an eerie blue. One was bigger, red and flickering, and soon they could see that this was a fire, a great stack of wood by the roadside, with the flames roaring high above it, surmounted by a cone of sparks. Beside the fire,

and lighted by it, a farm wagon had been placed, and the dark shape of a man could be seen on it, moving his arms in odd sharp gestures as he addressed a crowd in the distorting light. The fire was to light the speaker, but the torches were scattered here and there, swaying as they were held aloft, and they served to outline the crowd and show its size. Dick whistled with surprise.

'How many?' he asked.

He might well ask it. The throng of people were shoulder to shoulder, pressing as near to the speaker as they could, and this was a crowd of hundreds, men and women too, all on a lonely moor on a winter's night at the bidding of the Northern Star. They were very still and quiet, every face upturned to the man who was speaking, yet it seemed as if he were having to shout at his loudest to be heard.

Dick turned off the road, and just as he was leading through the fringe of the crowd the speaker stopped. He ended with a shout about the "People's Will", and there were scattered cheers as he stood with uplifted hand, an elderly thick-set man who looked a veteran of many a crowd and meeting. Then he jumped from the wagon, and Dick put questions to the nearest bystanders.

'I thought so.' He turned quickly back to Robert. 'That was Benbow. He's a Manchester man, and an old hand. Who'll be next, I wonder?'

He was quickly answered. Someone stirred the slackening fire, raking it and hurling more wood upon it. It crackled and roared, the flames leaping high with a shower of sparks and a stream of whirling smoke. Then it steadied, sending a blaze of light upon the wagon and a man who had appeared on it. He was taller than Benbow, slimmer and younger, and he seemed all in black until he turned to face his audience. Then, at his neck, white linen bands could be seen, fluttering as he moved, and at once there was a great roar of welcome, and a myriad hands were waving.

'Stephens,' Dick whispered it quickly. 'The Methodist. I don't know what he's doing here, but he's dangerous.'

At the moment he did not look it. He was standing very still and straight on the wagon, with the red glare beating on his face and bands. Slowly the cheering died, and he was utterly still. The crowd waited, and still he did not hurry. Slowly his face lifted, the firelight full upon it, and for a moment he

looked round him. Then, dramatically, he flung his hand up in command.

'Raise your banners.'

His voice came ringing, startling in its suddenness, and a quiver went through the crowd. Then, from the front of it, a dozen banners were raised aloft, glinting strange colours in the glow of light. One had a lurid dagger, and Tyrants, will you force us to it? Another showed a loaf of bread, with What do the Children eat? For the Ballot and the Charter, said a third. The People's Charter and the People's Will, replied a fourth. They went swaying up, while another roar of cheering came, and with the same dramatic sharpness the man on the wagon pointed to one among the banners. For the Rights of Man was all it said, and for a long moment he was pointing at it. A hush came to the crowd again as they waited.

'The rights of Man derive from God.' His voice came suddenly, hard and high. 'They may not be denied. They are

written here.'

He stopped, and with a flourish he held up what was surely a Bible, a reminder that the man was a divine, or claimed to be. At this moment he looked it. There was something of the prophet in him now, one sent to give the Law to erring men, and his words, when he spoke again, were as dramatic as the rest of him.

'The Poor Law that threatens you is *not* written here. It is no word of God. It is the word of Hell, to be spat upon and trampled under.'

The applause came as a deep-throated roar. The torches waved, setting the shadows dappling and the queer light flaming on his face. Then his gesture swept the crowd to silence as he spoke again.

'You know this Law, this thing conceived in infamy, this law to set man apart from wife, and wife apart from child, in the jail they call a Poorhouse! We have fought it by every lawful means, by every peaceful means, and we have fought in vain. So what remains? I ask you, what remains?'

Again he waited, while a throb of excitement ran. The fire was burning lower, and the torches dimmer. The light was less, but still the face above the bands had everybody's eye as he spoke again.

'When peaceful means have failed, when this vile law is come to pass, when the fetters of the Poorhouse are rivetted on hale and sick alike, on godly and ungodly, then I say to you it must be stopped. If it cannot be stopped by peace it must be stopped by war. War, I say—war.'

He howled it at them, his voice whipping suddenly to a peak of anger, and then his furious gestures swept them into a silence

that his own voice filled.

'When a man is to be torn from his wife, torn from his child, for no crime but the coming of age and the failing of hand and eye, then I say it is war. It can be no less. War to the knife for child and wife! Let that be our word. Let that be the oath of all.'

The roar of voices came like a thunderclap, shattering and deafening, while he stood with both hands raised as if he would invoke the Heavens to his cause. Then his words came like a torrent.

'Sooner than man and wife shall be torn apart and fed on their skillee gruel, sooner than wife and daughter shall wear the dress of shame, sooner shall all this country be one blaze of fire, to be quenched with one thing only——' His voice rose suddenly to a shout again, '——the blood of all who force this law upon the people.'

If he paused, it was for want of breath; but the crowd took the moment and their response was frightening. It was a deep and savage roar, and Robert, catching the note of fury in it, knew that these were the men who had hurled the stones and wielded clubs when the soldiers had been sent to the town. By the flickering light he saw men in a frenzy, waving hats, waving sticks, jumping in the air as if they must loose their feelings somehow. Then the uproar died like a quenched candle, as the Rev. Mr. Stephens raised his hands for silence.

'It is war to the knife and bloody end. If the sword and the pike will not avail, then let the women take the scissors, the child the pin and needle. And if all else fails, the firebrand! And who is so poor that he cannot have the firebrand? The palace shall be in flames, the Poorhouse in a hundred flames. The mill, the factory, the fine house of the master, all shall burn. The wrath of the Lord shall be on the land, as it was on Sodom, and the smoke of the land shall be as the smoke of a furnace.'

It was pandemonium now. The banners were up again, waving wildly, and a knot of men had hurled themselves at the fire, pulling the flaming brands and tossing them high in the

air. Others came pushing through the crowd, handing out new torches to be lighted from the stumps of old, and soon the stumps were hurtling through the air, fiery and dangerous, patterns for the firebrands that could follow. On the wagon Stephens had retreated and Robert felt a pull at his sleeve.

'Better get out of this,' said Dick. 'We don't want to be

caught in anything.'

A nod was the answer. They stepped out quickly, and behind them a series of shouts and a flurry of moving lights hinted that the crowd was too excited to be marshalled easily into order. Then, suddenly, came music, drum and trumpet, flute and trombone, and soon the thumping beat of the tune was coming clearly through the dark.

'Sounds like the Old Town Band,' said Dick.

They had come to the end of the upland now, and were beginning the steep descent. Behind them, faint and distant, was a thump of drums and a bray of brass, to tell of the procession formed at last for its journey home. Before them, across the valley, clusters of small dim lights showed where the town was clinging to the hill, quiet and peaceful now, soon to be roused by the band and the marching tramp of Chartists; soon, perhaps, to bear more than that, if there should be more of these inflaming speeches. Another night of the Rev. Joseph Stephens might see the firebrands whirling.

'It'll look different from here in another month or two,'

said Dick.

'Very likely, if Stephens goes on talking.'

'I was thinking of the Gas Company. Some of those windows should shine a bit brighter soon.'

'If they aren't broken first.'

'Don't think so much about Stephens. They won't all be Chartists, and I expect a lot of them were there just to see what it was all about.'

'They shouted like the rest, so they'll probably fling firebrands like the rest.'

'They might.' Dick spoke softly as they came to the bottom of the hill and the bridge that spanned the river. 'It might depend on what they were flinging them at.'

He meant power-looms, and Robert knew it. But he made no answer. He had turned his head, and behind him, at the crest of the hill, he could see the glare of torches in the sky, red and menacing.

THE FETTLER'S SHOP

THE next development was the arrival of Tom Ogden, the loomer. He brought Jack Hodson with him, as his reacher-in, and their presence had to be accounted for. Joe promptly gave it out that they were to demonstrate new and wonderful gas fittings to him, and Nicholas, who liked a good tale for its own sake, made it even better by adding that as Chairman of the Gas Company he was an interested party, and would be round at Joe's place pretty often to see the new fittings. There was, however, some trouble with Joe, who had woken up at last to what had been going on. The combined wage of the loomer and the reacher-in was eighteen shillings a week, and Joe thought his partner must have gone out of his senses. Robert did his best to explain the reasons why, but Joe preferred to have a grievance.

'Why didn't you tell me, before you went and did a thing like that?'

'I did tell you. I said we had to have a loomer.'

'You didn't tell me it was twelve shillings a week for the rest of his life, just to sit there scratching himself. And six shillings a week for his——'

'If you want a job done, you have to pay for it.'

'You don't have to pay the earth for it.'

There was more in the same vein, and it did nothing to put them on better terms. Then, while tempers were still high, another succession of packages began to come to the factory, and Joe recognized looms. He seemed to have no notion that a second batch had been bought, and at once he was angrily asking how many there were and what the cost would be. He was told, and he had to be told also that Dick Bradley was again in Manchester to buy looms. Joe looked almost beyond speech, and then he said flatly that he would provide no money for anything he had not agreed to first. He added that he did not care if the partnership broke or not.

That was check, since Robert knew very well that his own money was running out, and that he would soon be unable to pay even his share of anything until he received from Joe

that privately promised fee for help in promoting the Gas Company. But the money was not due until the Company was operating, and there was plainly no chance that Joe in his present mood would agree to pay it any sooner. So Robert had to make the best of things. He went to Nicholas, who took a different view of Joe's humours.

'That's Joe,' he said cheerfully. 'I thought he was looking hot.'

'I don't see what he has to grumble about. If he didn't know, he ought to have done.'

'A good many of us ought to know things and don't. You have to allow for that. But if you want to know what's upsetting Joe, I'll tell you. He's been running his own business for quite a while now, and he thought he'd branch out. He thought he'd have cotton upstairs, and he'd let you look after it for him.'

'That's not the way to put it.'

'It's the way Joe's been putting it, and that's what's upset him. Joe always thinks of himself in the front. You could do the work, but he'd decide everything, and you could go trotting to him twice a week to ask what to do next.'

'But that's ridiculous. Does he suppose--'

'Yes, he does. So this is a bit more than he bargained for.'
'I'm the leading partner.'

'Quite right. Mind you, Joe's a partner, too, so he can expect a say in things, and I don't know if it was very wise to ask him when he had a head full of beer. He might call that a bit sharp.' Nicholas seemed to be speaking casually now. You know, it isn't always enough to be right. You have to make the other man think you're right, and that can be the harder job of the two.'

'You mean I was wrong?'

'Don't worry. Joe's done a thing or two in his time that could be called sharp, and he'll get over this one. The main thing is, don't argue. Tempers don't stay hot by themselves, and if you leave 'em alone they cool off. That's often the best way, in the end.'

Robert took the advice and did his best to be patient. He had, fortunately, enough to do. Dick managed to buy a third lot of looms in Manchester, which brought the total to just over two hundred, and Joe said firmly that it would have to do. With what they looked like spending in wages, he said, this

was quite enough; and Robert was bound to agree, even though he was disappointed. So Tom Ogden was soon busy, setting up with the warp and weft the loom that had been made to work from a hand-crank. Robert took as much time as he could from St. Helen's mill to see this done; and then, with young Jack to turn the crank, he and Dick tried it out. Tom was their invaluable guide, and before long they were actually weaving cloth-if it was cloth, Robert looked at it in dismay and wondered. They had seemed to break a thread every minute, and they had not always noticed it, or they had not noticed it as soon as they should have done. The faults showed glaringly in the cloth, and Robert told himself that to employ Tom Ogden had been a wise decision. He could now see what would have happened if he had not learned in advance what tricks the looms could play. Shaw & Hoyle would have begun by weaving cloth that no one would dream of buying; and he could imagine what Joe's comment would have been on that. It might yet happen to some of their competitors; but it must not happen to Shaw & Hoyle.

So, as October passed into November, and November into December, there was steady work on the upper floor of Joe's factory. Robert was there whenever he could, working away at a loom, learning patiently and slowly how to see and deal with broken threads, and, above all, how not to break them. Nicholas made visits there, to sit at Robert's side and learn what he could for his own future use. Joe, too, was a frequent visitor. His temper had cooled, and he listened reasonably when Robert explained to him the troubles with the looms. He quickly understood that this was likely to save his money, and no one, after that, could have been more interested. He even stopped his complaints about the loomer's pay. Dick Bradley would look in from time to time, but everyone else was rigorously kept out. The doors stayed locked; and the fiction was maintained that this was an affair of gas fittings.

It was believed the more readily since gas was now a dominating interest. Construction had all but ended at the gas works, and it would now be only a matter of days before the lights were burning. Joe was working till all hours to have the last of his promised burners installed for the opening day. Nicholas, as chairman of the Company, made arrangements for a grandiose opening ceremony. He even demanded pies and the Old Town Band, with free beer for all who had built the works

and laid the pipes. Meanwhile in the privacy of his counting house, he was looking at the construction bills with a remarkable knowledge of what had actually been done. A good many bills had marginal notes before they were passed to Harry Bolton, who had as sharp an eve as Nicholas for a charge that could be queried or disallowed. Joe Earnshaw, who had become clerk to the Company, discovered at this stage that he was expected to earn his living. He had for some months past been calculating and paying the wages; and now, in addition to the checking of the bills, he found himself with all the arrangements for the band-and-beer party that Nicholas insisted upon. Nicholas, as Chairman of the Company, was well pleased that the great paying of wages had come to an end, and it was left to Dick Bradley to point out that it had done more than anything else to keep the peace in the town. It was coming to an end just when the hardest part of the winter was coming, and he thought that some trouble from the Chartists could be expected soon. If poverty led to desperation, they were not likely to miss the chance.

The Chartists, however, were quiet, and their nearest approach to trouble came on a Sunday morning when some hundreds of them marched noisily to the church, a little before anyone else had arrived. They swarmed into it, dirty and ragged, to the scandal of the regular members, who found themselves out in the rain, while their seats were filled by Chartists. But the Curate, showing a surprising knowledge of how to deal with this, calmly mounted his pulpit and told them he was glad to see them in the right place for once. Then, before they had recovered from that, he preached them an impromptu sermon on the sinfulness of riot and sedition, which they listened to in a dazed silence. Then they filed sheepishly out, leaving the spluttering churchwardens to wonder whether the place ought now to be fumigated, or whether scrubbing. would be enough. But it had not been real trouble. It had merely been a nuisance, and people were beginning to say that the Chartists were all words and noise, and need not be taken too seriously.

In the middle of December Robert wrote to Anna, who was still in Bradford, to ask if she could come for the opening of the gasworks. Anna replied that she could not, but that she hoped to be in Colne by January. She would then stay with Nicholas until Susan seemed to be in need of her. She ended, on

a slightly sardonic note, by sending her good wishes to the gasworks. Robert read her letter three times, and then took advantage of a starlit evening to walk out to Greenfield for a word with John and Susan. John seemed regretful that Anna would not be seen till January, but he hoped that she would arrive in time for the first puffings of his new steam engine, which was now nearly ready. Only some pipes had now to be connected, and he thought they would be ready for test about the end of the month.

'At all events, I hope so,' he said. 'We can have ice at any

time now, and I don't want another Laycock affair.'

'No.' Robert nodded sympathetically. 'How's the new man

getting on, by the way?'

The fettler who had replaced the unfortunate Laycock had not lasted very long. He had recently left, and there was now another, who had been in Joha's employment for only a few weeks.

'Heywood? I think he knows his work.'

'Then what's wrong? You don't sound happy about it.'

They were alone together now, and John took his time about answering.

'I came across something the other day,' he said at length. 'You'll remember the fettler's workshop, down by the wheelhouse? It's fairly well equipped, but of course every fettler wants something different. This man Heywood hadn't been here a week before he asked if he could have a forge in the shop. A small hand-forge, of course. There's quite a lot of rust in some of those iron straps that hold the shafting, and he said he could replace them if he had a forge. Of course, it isn't much more than a pan of charcoal, and a bellows with a foot treadle.'

'I know the sort of thing.'

'Yes. Well, he had it, and he has replaced some straps.'

'Then what's the trouble?'

'I'm trying to tell you. You know I try to take a walk round at the weekend, just to see that the place is as it should be. I do it on a Saturday when I can, but last week it was too dark when we'd finished, so I walked round on Sunday afternoon. Of course I was quite by myself, and the place was very quiet and still.'

'Yes?'

'It was a cold afternoon, and a deserted mill can be very

cold. I got colder and colder as I went on, and I expect that's why I noticed the fettler's shop. I'd left that place to the end, and I felt the difference as soon as I went in. It should have been as cold as the rest, and it wasn't. It was warm, much too warm for me to be mistaken.'

'Oh?'

Robert spoke quietly, and John paid no attention to him. He seemed absorbed in his own thoughts as he went on.

'There was something else too—a slight reek in the room, and for a moment or two I couldn't put a name to it. Then I went across and put my fingers on the charcoal in the pan, and I jumped back pretty sharply. That coal was stinging hot.'

'The forge had been used?'

'Very recently. Perhaps until I started my walk round. I'd left the fettler's place to the last, and somebody could have seen me coming.'

'Heywood? But how did he get into the mill?'

'He must have had a key, and I suppose a fettler could make one. Of course he wouldn't expect anyone there on a Sunday afternoon.'

'But what was he doing?'

'That's what I wondered, so I began to look round. It was all very tidy, just as it ought to be at weekends, and I couldn't see anything that looked like forgings, except a few straps for the shafting. There was a little pile of them on the bench, and I was pretty sure no one had forged those on a Sunday afternoon. I just stood where I was, looking at things, and hoping for a hint from somewhere. The forge was hot, and that was all. At the side there was that tank of water they have by a forge to dip things in. They pick them up hot in the tongs and plunge them in, and you know how rusty it leaves the water. Perhaps it was the dirty look of it that set me thinking. I dipped my finger it, and the water was quite warm. So I took the tongs from the anvil and began to feel along the bottom of the tank—and I'd guessed right.'

'But what was it?'

'What I fished out was a piece of iron about a foot-and-ahalf long, and it was made from the same iron strip as those straps. Quarter-inch stuff, and about three inches wide at the base. It tapered off to a long point, and it became thinner towards the point.'

'I don't quite see---'

'It was a spearhead—a pike, I suppose, is the proper name. And below the base the iron had been bent over in a sort of tube, just ready to slide a wooden handle into. There wasn't the least doubt what it was, or what it could be used for.'

'I see.' Robert spoke with a careful steadiness. 'So your man

Heywood is a Chartist? But what did you do next?'

'I tried the tank again, and I fished out three more of them. Of course they were in the rough, all blue from the forge, but they were ready for the grindstone, and I didn't like the look of them.'

'Then what did you do?'

'I took them away with me. I wasn't sure whether it was wise or not, but I couldn't leave them there, to be ground and finished. You could have murder done with them. Next morning I had a word with Heywood, and of course he said he didn't know anything about it.'

'Have you told anyone?'

'I took those pikes to Harry Bolton and he nearly jumped out of his chair. Then he insisted that I should swear an affidavit for the Justices, but what can they do? They've no force, and they'd be wiser not to provoke anything. We all know that.'

Robert was more disturbed than he cared to show. He had almost begun to share the common view that the local Chartists were more or less harmless, and suddenly that easy view of them had melted away. The scene on the moor was before his eyes again, with the torches, the howling crowd, and the deadly preaching of Joseph Stephens. The man's wild urgings to fire and blood had not been fantastic to hungry and bitter men, and the proof lay in the pikes. Knives and clubs were things men had, or could improvise, but pike-heads, forged in a sober corn-mill on a Sunday afternoon, were different. Here was intention, murderous and deliberate.

'What's it like in the town?' said John suddenly. 'How about your loom shop?'

'We've some way to go yet, but we're learning, and that may mean a lot once it's safe to open. It might give us a start over everybody else.'

'Over most people, certainly.' There was a sudden sharpness in John's tone. 'Have you ever thought that someone else might be getting ready, too?'

'Not specially.' Robert's tone had become sharp now, and

he was not sitting back quite as comfortably. 'John, what's in your mind?'

'Thornber. Tom has an interest in gas.'

'What's that to do with it?'

'You covered up your loomer by saying that he and his reacher-in were gas experts, didn't you? Can you think of a better way of setting Tom to ask about it?'

'Hadn't you better come to the point? What did Tom do?'

'He told me he took a walk down Colne Lane last Saturday. That was in the afternoon, after work had finished, and he said it was quiet down there.'

'Yes?'

'He said there was a window open at Hoyle's place, upstairs, and some lamplight in it. And he heard a noise through the window.'

'What sort of noise?'

'Gas be damned, was the way Tom put it. He said he couldn't mistake that noise for anything. It was a loom clacking—a power-loom, he said.'

27

DAYS OF WAITING

THE formal opening of the gasworks was carried out next Saturday, late in the afternoon, when the mills had stopped and a grey damp dusk was settling on the town. The high walls and heavy ironwork were stark and grim in the fading light as the guests assembled, all the shareholders and anyone in the town who looked important enough to become a shareholder if he wished to; and outside the walls were the lesser folk who would have the band and beer, which was more than they might have had if Old Nick had not stood out for them.

They were packed in hundreds on the green, and the band had been thumping its loudest for an hour or more when the lights came on at last. Burners had been fixed for the occasion round the whole circuit of the walls, and Nicholas. followed by Tom Thornber and a whole troop of others, made a solemn progress. Tom turning the taps and Nicholas applying the lighted taper. The flames leaped up, flaring and yellow in the misty afternoon, tinged with a thread of smoke, but there was no doubt about the light. It was a glare not known before in Waterside, and everyone was impressed. There was decorous handclapping inside and unrestrained cheering outside; and the Old Town Band, for some reason best known to itself, burst into 'Rule Britannia'. Then came the beer outside, the toasts in champagne inside, and the speeches of a sort that could have been expected. But they were short, and there would have been little sympathy with long-drawn oratory. All the guests had put burners in their shops and houses, and everybody wanted to be home to see them lighted. There had also been some bangs and flashes in the darkening town to hint that not everyone had judged the moment well for applying a taper, and a few of the guests left hurriedly. The others had no wish to linger.

By half past five, therefore, the guests were streaming out, some to light their burners, some to put butter on singed wives and sweep up broken glass. Robert was among the few who did not hurry. He took it easily, and when he at last moved to the gate he found himself beside Tom Thornber, who had also been among the last to go. Recognition was immediate under the flaring jets, and Robert was on the alert at once. He had thought a good deal about Tom Thornber since his visit to John the other night.

Tom, however, seemed less suspicious. An afternoon with gas had perhaps put him into a good humour, and he seemed almost genial as he fell into step at Robert's side.

'How's Joe Hoyle?' he said gruffly.

'He went off half an hour ago.'

'Pretty quick, by the look of him.'

'He heard some of those bangs in the town.'

'Aye. They'll want new burners or their money back. Some of those chaps 'ud say it's worth having your wife frizzed up a bit if you get ten per cent off the bill.'

'It seems a bit hard on Joe.'

'I've not heard of anyone yet who's had his money back from Joe.'

They had been walking across the green, and ahead of them they could see Joe's factory, with a triple burner flaring above the door and the lower windows bright and yellow in the dark. From the upper storey nothing showed.

'Clever chap, Joe,' said Tom. 'Lights what he wants you to look at. When are you going to light the top?'

'Better ask Joe.'

'How many looms have you put up there?'

If it was meant to succeed by shock, it failed, and Robert had already made his decision. A show of frankness would be better than evasions.

'Only a few,' he answered easily. 'We're just trying out.'

'Going pretty fast, aren't you?'

There was something almost of grudging admiration in it, and suddenly Robert was aware that Tom did not sound hostile. It might be no more than the mellowing effect of the afternoon, but it was certainly welcome. Robert tried to answer in the same style.

'We're just getting ready,' he said. 'Like you and your new steam engine.'

"That's right. What did you pay for your looms?"

'Fourteen shillings or so.'

'Chucking brass about, aren't you? Twelve and twopence was all I paid for mine.'

It was in the same frank tone, and it sounded as if he had recognized a new status and was speaking as one mill-owner to another. But he had let something out, and Robert found it startling. He had not supposed that anyone but himself had been buying looms.

'Pretty good.' His voice was carefully casual. 'Where did you buy them?'

'Well, I know a chap in Manchester.'

They were passing the door now, and through the lighted windows they could see the men busy at their benches, independent now of falling darkness. Above the door the triple burner was hissing and spluttering, and Tom's face was red in the glare of it. But he still sounded genial.

'When do you start?'

'I wish I knew.' Robert answered a little shortly, thinking

that it was his own turn to ask a question or two. 'Where's

your weaving shed?'

'It's not up yet. It's finding your looms that takes the time, not the shed. That's just a few bricks and bit of roof, and they'll knock it up in a couple of weeks when it's safe.' They had come to the main street now, and Tom halted. Then he seemed to speak confidentially. 'That chap I know in Manchester, he's a cloth merchant and he sells his stuff in London. He says they're all talking there about these Rural Police.'

'What's that?'

'Well, they have Bluecoats in the big towns now, and the magistrates are to start them for the other places too. That's what Ratcliffe says, so we might get 'em here. What good they are I don't know, but they might be better than nowt.'

Robert tried hurriedly to decide what importance this might have. But the distracting thought kept coming that he had heard somewhere of Ratcliffe before, and this put him off his other thoughts. For the moment he let them go, while he gave attention to Tom again.

'I hope you're right,' he said. 'Do you think there's anyone

else getting ready, except you and me?'

'Holroyd's talking, of course, and so's Dick Sagar, but I don't think they've done much yet.'

'What about the little men-Lonsdale and that lot?'

'They can't, and that's why they're turning so dam' nasty. Those putters-out mostly work on about twopence a week, so they haven't brass to buy an engine.'

'Then what will happen?'

'What you might expect. When the handlooms stop, the putters-out will too, and they dam' well know it. You want to look out for some of those chaps. If they can have our looms smashed up they won't think twice about it. Good night!'

He flung it abruptly, and then he went rolling away down the street, leaving Robert to walk very thoughtfully home. This had been a new Tom Thornber, one certainly taking the view that dog does not eat dog, but it had not taken him long to guess about the looms on the upper floor; and Tom, when all was said, had not the brightest mind in Colne. Someone else might guess, and it might be Lonsdale or any of the other putters-out whose trade would not survive the power-looms. Robert had not seen that point before, and it had needed—of all people—Tom Thornber to make him understand the feel-

ings with which the putters-out would regard a power-loom shop.

He walked round to see Joe about it the next night, and Joe, who was now rid of Mary Ann, pushed him into a chair and gave him some beer. Then he began to hear the tale, and the old resiliency was back in him. He did not look at all as if he would be easily put off.

'It's not too bad,' he said, 'though we must have been daft telling that tale about Ogden being a gas chap. Of course it would fetch Tom sniffing. But he did have a bit of luck, hearing that loom going. We'll have to be careful, of course, but I don't expect anyone else has guessed.'

'What about Lonsdale and the others, if they do find out? Tom thinks they could turn desperate.'

'He might be right. When we've been running six months you'll see some of those chaps tenting looms again, if anyone'll give 'em a job. What's this about Tom knowing a cloth merchant?'

'Ratcliffe? Well, John Phillips once told me he came across Tom in Manchester, having dinner with this man and his daughter.'

'That's it. Fat, wasn't she?'

'Shook like a jelly, John said.'

'Fancy our Tom!' The old grin was on Joe's face for a moment. 'I don't wonder he paid for her dinner if her father sells cloth. We'll have to watch him, though. He's a bit too dam' smart sometimes.'

'His sister's like that. You keep thinking Ellen's a fool and then you find she isn't. But what about these putting-out men, if they find out?'

'I don't like it much, specially with that man down at Phillips's place, making pikes. I've been watching my lot since then, I can tell you.'

'But what about the putting-out men?'

'Well, if they get to know about us they might tell the Chartists, and then we might have the place smashed up before we'd started. What do you think yourself?'

'I wondered if somebody might set the place on fire. I was thinking of the way that man Stephens was ranting at them. They were throwing torches about when he talked of firebrands.'

'Tell you what, then---' The light of inspiration came

suddenly to Joe. 'We've pretty well finished with those gas fittings now, and I was wondering how to keep the lads busy. I'll set 'em to it tomorrow. They can make a set of bars for all those lower windows, good thick stuff and close together. That'll stop folk climbing in.'

'You think someone might?'

'Aye, I do. It might be someone with a bit of fire, as you were saying, or it might just be Lonsdale, or one of that lot, wanting to have a look. Anyway, we'll stop him.'

'How about the doors?'

'Aye.' Joe looked thoughtful for a moment. 'We'll have to do like the landlords do when they think they've poachers round. I do quite a nice trade in spring guns. I'll have a couple made this week, and we'll set 'em round the floor at nights.'

'That's a bit much, isn't it?'

'No, it dam' well isn't. If anyone doesn't want a belly full of nails, he just has to keep out of my factory.'

'But suppose you kill someone?'

'Does anyone mind about a poacher when he's found with his guts blown out? Now what else is there?'

'I shouldn't think there's anything.'

'Except to have a word with Nick. It's always worth picking that man's brains.'

But Nicholas had problems enough of his own, as had everybody. The month was running out, and with it the year, and then it was 1839, which everyone said would be the Chartists' year, and Monday, 4 February was the day that had everyone's attention. The opening of Parliament that day would have been cause enough for some attention, for it was now known that the first business would be the Bill to enable magistrates to set up Police forces for their counties if they chose to; and the notion of these Rural Police was finding a lot of criticism. The cotton men thought they would be useless. Redcoated soldiers were needed now, they said, and the most they would concede, was that Police might be a shade better than nothing. They could perhaps pick drunks off the streets and separate a pair of fighting women, but that would be about the limit, and at the first sign of Chartists they would probably run away. There was a good deal of talk like that in the Hole i' th' Wall.

Down in Waterside there was talk of a different sort, mostly deriving from the Northern Star. The Police were to be licensed

brutes, the government's bludgeon-men; they would be every sort of ne'er-do-well, lodged in section-houses, drilled and trained to crack their lead-tipped clubs against the head of any starving weaver who should stand for the Rights of Man. The Chartist speakers made the most of it, and one of them stood on a tub outside the gasworks shouting of janizaries, the Star Chamber, and Reginald Front-de-Boeuf. His audience may not have known quite what he meant, but they acepted the spirit of the thing, and there were some growls of anger and some shakings of fists and sticks.

On a higher level, too, the Chartists were making use of February 4th. They had deliberately arranged that their Convention should meet that day, and hope ran high in all the hungry men who had taken pennies from their food for the National Rent that was to pay the delegates' expenses. Their struggles were all but over. The Convention, they said, spoke for millions, and it could not be denied.

So they talked in Waterside, and in the stinking streets and back-to-back houses of a hundred other towns. But in the homes of the professional men and the manufacturers there was no such belief. The Convention, they thought, would have no influence at all. Parliament was not in the least likely to have any dealings with this talk about secret ballots and votes for men who held no property, and the manufacturers did not share the belief that the Convention would then know what to do. The delegates to this Convention, they said, seemed to be a set of silly cocksure agitators, living very comfortably on the National Rent, and when Parliament refused to be frightened by the noise they made they would have to justify their boasting or admit that they were useless; and these were not fellows to eat their boasts and admit the truth. The Hole i' th' Wall was agreed about that. Louder boastings and threats of force seemed more in character; and that, with their followers dancing to the tune of the Northern Star, was likely to end in war, war with pikes and clubs against a tiny peacetime army and whatever else could be mustered. With the disparity of numbers it was no good prospect, but it could come.

Twice in January Nicholas went off to Manchester on what he called the public interest, by which he meant the Anti-Corn Law Association, of which he was now a zealous member. He came back delighted with the truculence and virility of these Manchester men, who had already subscribed six thousand

pounds to pay for a flood of pamphlets and lecturers. They meant to convert the entire country to their views, and Nicholas was chuckling over a prediction of their principal speaker, Mr. Alderman Cobden, that what Manchester thought today the nation would think tomorrow.

It was at this juncture that Anna returned to Colne. It was the last Saturday in January, a day of winter cold, with squalls of rain spattering from a north-west wind, and the coach from Yorkshire was as late as everyone had guessed it would be. An hour went by before Susie England was sent by Ellen to the mill with word that Anna had arrived. Ellen sent also an invitation for Robert to go to Cumberland House that evening, and when he arrived he found her with Anna by a warm and cheerful fire. Ellen was still not short of words.

'We haven't seen you since Christmas,' she told him. 'All you men are the same. You're so busy that you never have time to look at us at all, and it will be the same with Anna when she marries. She'll never see her husband when it's daylight except when he's having his dinner, and then he'll just

sit there and eat.'

'Surely not? But how is Anna?'

'Excellent, thank you.' She spoke for herself in the old cool tone. 'A little tired. Otherwise excellent. I'm warm again, and glad to see you.' She glanced, smiling, round the room. 'There

seems to be some progress here.'

She was looking at the big crystal chandelier that hung from the ceiling, with its candle-holders converted now to gas. But it was not in use. There was an oil lamp on the table and candles on the mantelpiece, and the chandelier was gleaming in their softer light. Ellen spoke vigorously.

'I can't think of anything sillier, but of course anything his father didn't have is what Nicholas wants. You have to plug your nose when you burn the stuff, and when you get a light you can't see because your eyes are running. Does anybody

like gas, Mr. Shaw?'

'I think your brother does.'

'Tom? He's mad. He has the stuff fizzing all the time, and Ann spends her evening with her head out of the window coughing.'

The door opened noisily and Nicholas came cheerfully in. 'That's all right,' he said. 'Betsy settled and put to sleep. Gas turned out, and now we can have a bit of peace. Evening. Robert! Haven't they given you a drink yet?' He went wandering across to the sideboard as he spoke. 'How about you, Anna?'

'Ellen's tea, if I may. I like Twankay. But Robert, isn't it time you were telling me about yourself? You were getting things ready, weren't you?'

'I've tried to tell you so in my letters.'

'There's so much that letters don't say. Besides, I want to

see things for myself.'

'That's right, Anna.' Ellen pushed herself suddenly into the talk again. 'You stand up for what you want, or you won't get it. It's the same with Nicholas, and when he isn't rushing off in a railway train he's hanging gas pipes from the ceiling and what he'll do next I don't know. Now I'll see about the tea, and what Mother would have thought of all this I don't know.'

She went indignantly out, and Nicholas eyed his sister with

amusement.

'Better not be shy, Anna. Tell him what you want.'

'I mean to. Robert, I want to see these looms of yours. And what about this cloth you and Dick have been weaving? Haven't you brought me a length of it?'

'It isn't that kind of cloth. It isn't fit to show to anybody, .

yet.'

'I still want to see it.'

'You'll have to show her,' said Nicholas calmly. 'How about Sunday?'

'That's chapel.'

'You'll get into trouble if you go on making difficulties. What time do you finish chapel?'

'About three o'clock.'

'An hour of daylight left. You could get the key from Joe,

I suppose?'

'Of course.' He spoke to Anna now, and his tone was brisk. 'But there won't be time to arrange it for tomorrow, so it will have to be the Sunday after. I'll ask Dick to come, and we'll try to show you how everything works.'

'I'm not being a nuisance, am I?' Her eyes were suddenly very clear and bright. 'You'll remember that I do have an

interest in all this.'

SUNDAY AFTERNOON

JOE HALSTEAD had a dandy shop in Windy Bank. This meant a large bare room into which he had put some handlooms which could be used, at a weekly rent, by any weaver who had no loom of his own. Halstead did not, of course, make a living out of the trifling rents that handloom men could pay. He was really a putter-out, and his dandy shop was a secondary source of income. He did not therefore take much notice of it. He opened and shut it at stated hours, and that was about all. He did not even have it swept out, and if the weavers wanted it swept they could sweep it for themselves. There was no money for luxuries of that sort.

On the Monday after Anna's return to Colne, Halstead went as usual to his dandy shop to open it for work, and he found a key already in the lock. It was jammed there. It turned readily enough, but it would not come out of the lock. Halstead stared at it in surprise, made sure that his own key was in his pocket, and then tried to think this out. Someone had presumably used this key to gain entry during the weekend, and the reason might have been theft, or to use a loom without paying for it. Halstead soon ruled out theft, and the use of a loom did not fit with another detail that his sharp eye noted. The floor had been swept. When he had locked the shop on Saturday the floor had been the usual litter of yarn and scraps of cloth, and it was now smooth and bare. Nor had this been done by anyone with an itch for tidiness. The rubbish had not been swept into the street, as was usual. It had merely been pushed to the sides of the room, to the spaces between the looms, and there it still was. Halstead looked at it, and then scratched his head. The notion that somebody had broken in for the purpose of sweeping rubbish from one part of the floor to another was merely silly. Yet there was the rubbish, piled between the looms; and nothing else had been touched.

Halstead could make nothing of it. He wasted another five minutes trying to get that key out of the lock, and in the end he had to ask Joe Hoyle to send a locksmith to it. Then he went about his affairs, but he had not done with the problem. It nagged at him through the day, and by the time he had had his tea he thought it would put him off his sleep if he did not talk to somebody about it. That, to Halstead, meant the Hole i' th' Wall.

Robert was in search of Joe that night, and the obvious place to look for Joe on a Monday night was the Hole i' th' Wall. So when Robert walked into a crowded room a little after eight o'clock he found everybody listening to Halstead. Robert listened too, and thus heard of these events in the dandy shop.

'And what I'd like to know,' said Halstead, 'is what's it all about? Joe, did that locksmith of yours say why the key stuck?'

'It didn't fit right. It wanted another rub with a file.' 'Well, why did the chap want to sweep the floor?'

'He might have been mad. I had a chap once who——'

'Never mind that,' said Dick Sagar, and he was looking very steadily at Halstead. 'Do you keep any Chartists in this dandy shop of yours?'

'What's it to do with Chartists? They don't sweep floors, do

they?'

'I don't know what they do. But I don't like the look of it. Have you told Bolton?'

'He'd think I was daft.'

'Never mind that, I think you'd better tell him. We don't know what Chartists are up to these days, and some of us have found things we don't like.'

It quickly appeared that Sagar was voicing the general thought. These were worried men, and perhaps the more so because what had happened lately had not been very clear or certain. John Phillips had reported finding the pikes in his fettler's workshop, and Harry Bolton, on orders from the magistrates, had passed the warning to every factory owner in the town. They had been asked to take precautions and to keep their eyes open; and within three days Tom Thornber had something to report. Late one evening he had seen a glow of light in the mill, vague and diffuse, as if it were flinging from a window he could not see, and Tom had at once gone to investigate. He had found everything locked and dark. But in the fettler's shop the gas burners had a warmth in them. and on the floor was a spatter of lead, bright and shining, which had certainly been a molten drop when it splashed on the greasy boards. That was all, and it seemed to have no meaning until it was found that part of a lead flashing had

been ripped from the base of a chimney; and Tom, without much evidence, leaped to the conclusion that it had been melted in his workshop for casting bullets.

Joe Hoyle was the next. Joe had done some stocktaking, particularly checking his stores of strip iron, and he had found himself short of some sixty pounds of the three-inch by quarterinch strip that had been used for pikes in Phillips's workshop. Joe thought it equivalent to about thirty pikes, but there was

no evidence, and nobody knew anything.

Then it was Dick Sagar's turn. He made a surprise visit to his mill one Sunday morning, and as he opened the door he heard a whirring noise which he thought he knew. He went at a run to the fettler's shop, but there must have been a watcher, and Sagar burst into an empty workshop. Then he heard the outer door slam, and when he reached it he found that the key, which in his hurry he had left in the lock had been turned against him. He had to climb out of his own mill by a window, and there was then not a soul in sight, nor any sound but the splashing of the river. But he had at least been sure that the sound he heard when he entered the mill had been the whirring of a grindstone, and he now found that the floor of the fettler's shop was powdered with dust of iron, just in front of the grindstone. There was again no certainty; but pikes would need to be ground after they were forged.

There was consequently much support for Sagar when he urged that Bolton and the Justices should be told of the affair in the dandy shop. True, it was not quite like the others, and no one could see why a Chartist, or anyone else, should sweep dust in a dandy shop. But these were worried men, not inclined to be less suspicious because they could see no purpose. Halstead gave way and promised to see Bolton, and a relieved gathering turned to more general talk. Robert caught Joe's eye, and moved with him to a corner to explain about taking Anna to see the looms. He asked Joe to let him have a key of the factory door, and Joe's response was startling.

'I dam' well won't,' he answered. 'I'm keeping you alive, my lad.'

'What are you talking about?'

'Guns. You don't know where the wires are.'

He went on to explain it more fully. He had meant what he said about bars and guns for his factory, and he had put his men to work at it the next morning. He now thought that

every window in the place was secure at night, and he had set two of his men to making a pair of wide-bore guns, mounted on low tripods, and with specially delicate trigger movements. Each trigger had a hole drilled through it, in which a tiny hook could be engaged; and a length of fishing-line from the hook ran through an evelet on the tripod, and thence to a system of wires stretched low across the floor. Anyone stumbling into the wires would, of course, discharge the guns, and his men knew all about that. They had to walk past the guns as they went out, but it was Joe himself who set the trap. He did this alone, after the men had gone, and he used a different position for the wires each night. The men therefore knew that there was a deadly danger for anyone who opened the door at night, but they did not know exactly where the danger was. This was the risk that Robert was not to be allowed to take on Sunday. especially as he would have Anna with him.

Joe however, was unusually helpful. He seemed to have a soft spot for Anna, and he said he would come with them, and himself open the door and make the place safe before she went in. Joe, of course, could do this without any serious risk. He had placed the wires himself, and he knew where to put his feet.

He kept to his promise. Sunday was as grey and wet as a winter's afternoon could be. A cloud of fine soft rain was sweeping across the town, setting the roofs dripping and the water streaming across the cobbles of the street, but when Robert stepped out of the Inghamite chapel, buttoning his collar against the sweeping rain, he saw Joe on the other side of the street, stumping down towards the factory door. A few yards behind him was Dick Bradley, treading with care on the wet and treacherous cobbles.

'Fine for ducks,' said Joe. 'Let's have this door open.'

He had produced a formidable bunch of keys, and he was selecting the right one when Dick arrived.

'How-de-do?' said Joe, as he carefully fitted the key to the lock. 'You'd better stand back a bit, both of you, while I get this clear.'

They waited while Joe pushed the door carefully open, and as they looked down the wet street a man on the other side moved hurriedly away. He had been leaning against a wall there, with a sack over his shoulders as a protection against the rain, and now he lurched suddenly erect. He pulled the sack from his shoulders, gave it a flap that sent a shower of water hurtling from it, and then he went marching down to Waterside with his clogs clattering noisily. But neither of them took much notice of him. They had seen Nicholas and Anna picking a careful way down the lane, and Joe greeted her as an old friend. Then he led in, and she was the first to follow.

'Step over,' said Joe.

The door was not yet shut, yet the light was dim, and Robert had to look carefully to see the three fine wires that were stretched across the floor. A length of the finest fishing-line led from each, passing through an eyelet in the floor and thence to a further length of line which had a blunted fish-hook at either end; and the two hooks could pass through holes in the triggers of the guns Joe, in fact, had just disengaged the hooks, and all was safe; but with the hooks put back and all stretched taut the thing was a threat of instant brutal death to anyone who stumbled, however gently, into any of the wires.

'Neat, isn't it?' said Joe. 'It's no trouble.'

He stepped across to shut and lock the door, and at once, in the gloom, the wires faded from sight. Only the guns could be seen, short and wide-mouthed, sturdy on their tripods as they faced the door. A gleam of light from a window fell on one of them, showing the hammer cocked menacingly. Robert saw it, and he saw that Anna was looking at it too. She turned quickly away and avoided his eye, but Joe was his most jovial self as he spoke to her.

'Now,' he said, 'what would you like to see? I hope you're

not too wet?'

'Not at all.' She was throwing back her hood as she spoke.

'I'd better take my cape off.'

'That's right. You can leave it in here. This is my office.' He was noisily unlocking another door, and he flung it open with a flourish for her. She followed him in, slipping the cape of Mackintosh cloth from her shoulders as she looked round. It was an austere room, with little but a table and chairs and a desk, but a square metal box with some dials on it lay on the table. It seemed to take Anna's interest, and Joe responded at once.

'It's the latest thing in gas meters. Let me show you.'

It was evidently no trouble to show anything to Anna, and he carried it to the desk below the window.

'Now you see these dials?' he said. 'In any other meter they

read in feet of gas, but this one reads in money, and I don't think your brother likes it.'

'Why not?'

'He says folk won't use so much gas if they know what it's costing 'em. He might be right, too.'

He stopped, whirling round to face the door, and the jovial look had gone from him on the instant. Beyond the closed door, in the room they had just left, a foot had scraped on the boards; and in the same moment the key of the office, which he had left in the lock, was turned from the other side.

'Hell!'

He leaped like a great cat, but he was too late. He rattled the handle and tugged at it furiously, but the door stayed shut and locked. Then he went thrusting across to the desk.

'Same lousy trick they played on Sagar,' he said. 'They locked him in, too. That's why I put this here.'

He had produced a four-foot crowbar from between the desk and the wall, and he was flourishing the thing like a club as he went back to the door. He leaned his weight on it, and there was a loud splintering of wood as the door swung open. Joe went plunging through, with the crowbar swinging in his hand, and Dick went after him. Robert stood motionless, and a memory came flashing through his mind of a warning he had heard.

'Look out!' He shouted it urgently. 'The wires may be——'
He left it unfinished as he leaped towards the door. Joe spun
round, checking abrubtly in his stride.

'What's that?' he asked.

Then he guessed. He turned again, stooping low as he peered through the gloom at the wires he had rendered slack and safe. Then there was a soft laugh, which did not denote amusement.

'Very neat,' was his comment. 'All hooked up again.'

Robert moved up to him, stepping carefully, and Nicholas was close at his side. In silence they looked, and they saw that the hooks were engaged in the triggers, and the wires pulled taut. The trap was set; and Joe had been racing to the door, heedless of everything.

'You're lucky,' said Nicholas quietly.

'Well, I thought it was all safe.' Joe stroked his chin thoughtfully as he looked again at the wires. 'There'd have been a bang and a stink.'

'And a dead man too, I fancy.'

'I'm not as daft as that.' Something like the old chuckle came from Joe. 'I don't have bullets in, with all this crowd walking round. It's not dam' well safe.'

'The devil!' said Nicholas. 'You mean they're empty?'

'Just powder and wads.' He walked casually across and tried the outer door. 'Not locked now, you see. So they have made a key.'

'We could have guessed that anyway. But it doesn't look as

if your guns keep these fellows out.'

'I always did say they could get in on a Sunday, when it's daylight. They can see where to go, but I don't think they'll try it at night, in the dark. And I do have bullets in 'em then. Now, we'd better have a look round.'

He locked the door carefully, and then he took his crowbar as he led warily from room to room. But there was no need of further care. The factory was empty of intruders now, and whoever had been hidden was safely away.

'They must have heard us come in,' said Joe, 'and then they

just waited their time. Pretty cool.'

'They were warned,' said Dick suddenly and he glanced at Robert. 'That fellow outside, waving a sack. But what were they doing here?'

'Making something, I suppose. Well, what do we do now?

Looms, is it?'

He had turned to Anna, with the air of one still anxious to please, but she shook her head.

'No,' she said firmly. 'Not this afternoon. I don't think I could pay attention now.'

'Perhaps you're right.'

'She's certainly right,' Nicholas broke into the talk. 'In any case, it would mean gaslight, and we don't want to draw too much attention. Let's get home and have some tea.'

Nobody disputed it. There was something eerie now about this cold echoing building, with the dark of night spreading through it, and the sense was in all their minds of unseen watchers, and perhaps of a trap they had not yet seen. Warmth and a lighted room made a much more attractive thought, and Robert went back to the office for Anna's cape. There was a last look round and a final checking of doors, and then they were in the street again, standing for a moment in a group while Joe locked the door. The rain had slackened, but it was

still drizzling softly, and dusk was certainly upon the town. Opposite was the chapel and a little below it a man was standing, leaning against a wall.

'There's a watcher,' said Dick quietly. 'Just where the other

one was.'

'The hell it is!' said Joe.

He straightened as he pulled the key from the lock, and suddenly he went striding across the street, heavy and truculent. The man saw him and moved off. Joe quickened his pace and the man broke into a run, forgetting, perhaps, his clogs and the steepness of the lane. He stumbled, and on the wet mud his clogs went sliding. He bumped heavily and Joe was on top of him before he could recover. He was in boots, which would grip the cobbles better than any clog, and he planted one of them firmly while he swung the other. The man yelped as the heavy boot drove into him, and as he twisted madly away Joe stepped forward. Two more kicks thudded into him, leaving him writhing and slipping on the stones. Joe stood watching grimly. Then he turned about, leaving the man to climb painfully to his feet and go limping down to Waterside. Joe came back with a grin on his face.

'Why did you kick him?' asked Nicholas.

'Why not? He'll think of me for a day or two now.'

'All right.' Nicholas spoke curtly, and then turned. 'Let's find that tea.'

They went slowly up the lane, and Nicholas seemed thoughtful.

'I suppose it's the same trick again,' he said. 'They were using your factory?'

'Same game with all of us, if you ask me. Making things.'

'What about Halstead?'

'That might be different. I don't make sense of that.'

'Nor me.'

They lapsed into silence, keeping their breath for the climb, and when they came to the top they halted with one accord, looking up and down the rain-swept street. At this hour of Sunday it was deserted, wet and grey in the dusk, and only here and there did a lighted window throw a gleam on the cobbles. The shops were dark and empty, and the houses had drawn their curtains to shut it out.

'They're having their teas,' said Joe, 'and I don't blame 'em.' Nicholas nodded, but he still seemed thoughtful as he led

up the street towards Cumberland House. Then, before they had gone twenty yards, he stopped again, whirling round as a clatter of clogs broke out behind them. In the quiet of the empty street it was unexpected, and there was no one in sight. But the noise was louder and nearer, and suddenly Dick Bradley guessed.

'Windy Bank,' he said.

He was right. Windy Bank was opposite to the Colne Lane they had just come from, and the men in clogs were coming noisily up it. They came two by two, looking neither to the right nor the left, utterly ignoring the main street as they marched steadily across it and into Colne Lane. There were thirty or more of them, and they might have been any of the sorts of men who lived in Waterside. But they were going purposefully, in a fine good order, heads erect and shoulders squared, their arms swinging, and their feet clattering like a single pair as they kept in step. It was by no means the usual walk of Waterside, and the little group of watchers stared.

'What the devil!' said Joe.
'They're marching,' said Dick.

Nicholas slapped his hand suddenly against his leg.

'Well, I'm damned!' he said softly. 'That's what they've been doing.' He jerked his thumb towards Windy Bank. 'Halstead's dandy shop down yonder. They've been drilling there. That's why they sweep his floor.'

He stood for a moment, listening to the receding clogs as the men marched down to Waterside, and in the fading light

his face looked tense.

'Pike drill,' he said softly. 'The devils!'

THE QUARREL

SAM HARTLEY came into the counting-house next morning, which was the fateful 4th of February, and he seemed to be in no hurry. Nicholas, thinking he should report his guess about the drilling, had gone in search of Harry Bolton; Dick was round at the colliery, arguing about a coal bill, and Robert was alone. Sam made a request for some stores to be ordered, and then seemed inclined to talk.

'Aye, aye.' He cocked his head on one side. 'Will you be leaving us soon?'

He came out with it suddenly, and Robert sat still. He tried to keep his face without expression as he answered.

'Why should I be leaving you?'

'I thought you might_be going to Hoyle's place.'

'Why?'

'Well, why not?' Sam had an artless look now. 'They were saying last night you've been putting looms in. About two hundred, they say.'

'You shouldn't believe all you hear, Sam.'

'I don't.' There was another slight pause. 'I don't believe that chap Ogden knows about gas.'

The news was plainly out, and the only question was how to make the best of it. If Sam were now taken a little into confidence he would probably be pleased and flattered; so Robert nodded and tried to be friendly about it.

'It's something like that,' he said quietly, 'though it won't happen just yet. But where did you hear all this?'

'It's how they were talking last night, over in the Rodney yonder.' Sam jerked his head to the Admiral Rodney tavern. 'Some of them seemed to know what they were talking about. Hoyle's chaps mostly.'

'They would be.'

Robert answered tersely as he guessed now what the intruders had been doing in the factory yesterday. As well as making something in the workshop they had been to the upper storey and seen the looms.

'They may not have been quite right about it,' he said slowly. 'What do they say they've seen?'

'Power-looms. A couple o' hundred of 'em, mostly stripped down.

'And I suppose the Rodney was full of handloom men. as usual?'

'Not now it isn't.' Sam shook his head slowly. 'You need twopence in your pocket for that and they haven't a quarter of twopence, most of 'em. They've spent what the Gas Company paid 'em, and they're waiting for t'nettles to grow. There was just one or two in the place, and Hoyle's chaps paying for their beer.'

'And these two, I suppose, will tell the others?'

'They all have tongues.' Sam sounded pleasantly cheerful about it. 'But is Tom Ogden your tackler?'

'He's head loomer. Or he will be, if we ever start.'

'Why shouldn't you start?'

You know these weavers as well as I do. How do you think

they'll take it?'

'Oh, I see.' Sam rubbed his fingers through his hair and looked as cheerful as before. 'They won't like it, most of 'em, but there'll be some that do.'

'Which?'

'Those you give jobs to.'

'But-' Robert stopped himself, just in time, from letting it out that he meant the work to be for women and girls, and not for handloom men. 'But I don't know how many jobs there'll be.'

'A few's better than none when you're as short as those chans are.'

'Well, you'd better tell 'em so. But what's going to happen

if they start throwing firebrands?"

'I don't think they will, not while they think there's a job coming. And there's Hoyle's chaps, you know. They'd just about crack a man's head in if they thought he was burning the place. They don't want to be out of work, any more than other men do. But coming back to Ogden, if he's to be your loomer, who's your head tackler?'

'We haven't one yet.'

'Ah!' Sam sounded suddenly pleased. 'Now that's what I was coming to. I think Harry would like that job. That's my young brother.'

'I didn't know you had a brother.'

'He's in Blackburn, having a bit more sense than some. He's a tackler, but he'd like to be a head tackler.'

'All right, Sam. I'll see him.'

'Right. I'll tell him to come.'

'Not just yet.' There was a hurried thought of what Joe would say if any more wages had to be paid. 'We're not ready yet, but as soon as we are I'll let you know.'

Dick returned at that moment, shaking a cloud of raindrops from his greatcoat as he strode into the room, and Sam turned

cheerfully to greet him.

'Morning,' he said. 'Ducks still swimming?'

'Those that aren't drowned.'

'That's it. Well, I'll be going. Can't stand here talking all day.'
The clatter of his feet died away down the corridor and
Robert began to explain the matter to Dick. He was still
explaining it when Nicholas came stamping in, to fling his wet
overcoat across a chair and listen. Then he looked grave.

'You needn't look surprised,' he said. 'You can't keep things

to yourself in this town. All the same, it's bad.'

'Sam thought Joe's men might try to keep things quiet. They don't want to lose their jobs.'

'What can twenty of 'em do? We've close on four thousand handloom men in this town.'

'They may not all want to make trouble.'

'If only half of 'em do, it'll be enough. Now there's some-

thing else. Listen---'

He plunged straight into it. He had been to the town, he reminded them, to see Harry Bolton about the chance that men were drilling in Halstead's dandy shop. William Wood, the magistrate, had been at the office for the discussion of affairs he usually had on Mondays, and he had taken a serious view of the matter. He had been perturbed by the reports of men casting bullets and forging pikes, and he could not take lightly the chance that men were now being drilled to use them. But proof of it was needed before action could be taken, and the problem was how to get it. This would be difficult enough anyway, but it would be more so if the weavers knew that the magistrates were watching. The matter was therefore to be kept a strict secret, not to be disclosed even in the Hole i' th' Wall. Wood had been positive about it, and Nicholas had agreed.

'I went back home after that,' he said, 'and told Anna. Then I looked in at Joe's place. Now I'm telling you, both of you.'

'All right,' said Dick. 'But how are they going to get this proof?'

'I've no notion. You'd better let me know if you can think of anything.'

Joe was in the Hole i' th' Wall that night, and he was soon told what his men had been saying in the Admiral Rodney. He staved quite calm, and he did not even show surprise.

'Aye,' he growled. 'I always did say they could play tricks on a Sunday, when it's light. It was a good lock on that door too.'

'Then you must have some good locksmiths.'

'Two of 'em, and Botany Bay's where they ought to be. They're tramping t' street now, looking for jobs.'

'You've turned them off?'

'I'm going right out o' that trade till we're done wi' this trouble. I've changed my locks again, and I'm having none there that knows how to pick one. Have you told Tom Thornber about this?'

'Why should I?'

'It might be right to warn him. They might know he's bought looms.'

'That's true. But you know him better than I do. Will you tell him?'

'I'm not going traipsing down there after him. It'll have to wait till he comes up here. There's a lot that's waiting these days.'

He meant that this was the 4th of February, and that the whole nation was waiting for news. Whatever had happened in Parliament and the Convention would be known already to the newspapers, and there would be men sitting late in the night to get the account of it written. It would be printed tomorrow, and might be expected in Colne by Wednesday; which, as Dick remarked, showed what modern ways could do. Yet the news, when it came, was that the Convention, which had been expected to present at once its petition for the Charter, had settled into a debate about what it was there for. The members, apparently, were not in agreement even about this, and their debate soon became a wrangle that showed no sign of stopping. They were all too busy disputing to have any thought of presenting the petition, and Nicholas remarked with

satisfaction that they would probably go on like that till the money ran out. When they could no longer buy their dinners they might learn some sense.

The House of Commons ignored all that. The Rural Police Bill had been introduced in proper form, and the leisurely debate on it had begun. In the following week the House refused to hear a statement about the effects of the Corn Laws; and Nicholas, reading about this, packed his bag and went off to a meeting in Manchester. That was in the last week of February, and the rest of the town hardly noticed his going. They had trouble enough of their own by then, and it had come upon them suddenly.

This might have been because Joe was a little careless when he kept his promise to tell Tom Thornber that the handloom men now knew of the power-looms in the town. On the Friday evening Tom made one of his rare appearances in the Hole i'th' Wall, and Joe tackled him at once. Tom looked annoyed when he began to understand what this was about.

'Pretty dam' careless, aren't you?' he said. 'Couldn't you put a lock on your door?'

'You try keeping a locksmith out when he means to get in.'
Joe was looking red in the face. 'Shut up about what you don't
know, and try listening. That's how some folk learn things.'

Joe had raised his voice in annoyance, and round the room men turned their heads at the sound of it. Neither Joe nor Tom took any notice of that.

'You just listen,' said Joe noisily. 'There's every Jack Weaver in town knows we've looms in my place.'

'More fool you!'

'More fool yourself! Jack may be a bit soft, but he's not soft enough to think you've spent your money on a new engine just for fun. He might start guessing.'

'To hell with his guessing!'

'Well, you know how it is. Or you should, by this time—the way things get round.'

'Aye, I know. But---'

'Well, it's no good sitting here shouting at each other. I'm only trying to let you know. Have another drink?'

He waved for it, and the heads that had been turned towards them turned quickly away again. Neither of them seemed to know that they had drawn attention to themselves.

They began to wonder about it a few days later. On the

Thursday of the next week Sam Hartley again found a chance to have a word with Robert. He gave a cheerful nod that took in Dick as well, and then he came to the point.

'There's a bit more talk about looms,' he said.

'Oh?' Robert dropped his pen at once. 'What is it this time?'

'It's the handloom chaps.' Sam rubbed his hand through his hair in the inevitable style. 'It's about Tom Thornber now. They say he has power-looms too, all ready to move 'em in.'

'Where did they get that from, Sam?'

'Well, that's the queer thing. They've all the same tale, about Thornber having 'em, and they all picked it up with the weft.'

Sam soon made that plain. Throughout the week the hand-loom men had been picking up their usual quantities of warp and weft from their employers, some on one day and some on another. Most employers kept strictly to business on these occasions, but this week they had all been talkative, and all of them, along with the warp and weft, had put out the same tale to their men. It had been the tale of Tom Thornber and his looms, followed by a broad hint that between him and Shaw & Hoyle there would soon be no work left for the handloom men. They could expect the new Poor Law, which meant the workhouse.

Sam came out with it tersely, and he stressed the point that all the employers had told the same tale; which, he thought, proved that this was concerted action, and no mere accident.

'You're right,' said Robert grimly.

He had no doubt of it at all. This was something carefully thought out, and it was exactly the tale, even to that detail about the workhouse, most likely to rouse the weavers to fury. Someone had done some thinking.

'They've been putting their heads together,' said Dick.

It was the same thought, and Robert did not argue the point. But there were two things he felt he should do, even if they were not of much use. He must warn Joe at once, and it seemed only right to let Tom Thornber have the warning too. So he did his best. Joe asked noisily how the putters-out had learned so much about Tom Thornber's looms, and then he began to remember his talk with Tom in the Hole i' th' Wall, and to wonder if it had been indiscreet. He agreed that Tom should be warned, and Robert went down to Vivary Bridge that evening. Tom, who was sitting by the fire in his slippers,

could hardly have been called welcoming, but he waved him to a chair and asked gruffly what the trouble was.

He was slower in the wits than Joe, and Robert had to repeat the tale before it seemed to sink in. Then Tom's expression changed. His jaw stuck out, and all the old truculence was suddenly in his face.

'How the hell did they know?' he demanded.

'Because you talked to Joe too loudly.'

Robert explained it in that style, well knowing that no other style would be much heeded. Tom listened, growling with anger, and then put the blame on Joe.'

'He sat there bawling at me,' he said. 'Well, what's he doing about it?'

'I don't know. I've only seen him for five minutes.'

'Fat lot of use that is! Where is he now?'

'I don't know.'

'Is there any dam' thing you do know? Where does he go on Thursday nights?'

'The Hole i' th' Wall, I should think.'

'Wait till I get my boots.'

A quarter of an hour later they walked into the Hole i' th' Wall together, and the moment may have been unfortunate. Joe was not there, but a half-dozen of the putting-out men were in a circle round a table—Lonsdale, Halstead, big Sam Sutcliffe from Colne Lane, and one or two others. Tom saw them at once, and he stood for a moment by the door, glowering at them, while his jaw seemed to push out farther than before.

'There the bastards are,' he muttered.

He stood for a further moment, and then he went striding towards the table, pushing his way aggressively through the crowded room. His temper seemed to worsen as he went, and his way of announcing his presence was a vicious kick at the table. The crack of it resounded through the room, and splashes of beer leaped from a half-dozen mugs as the table lurched. The men whipped round, and Tom gazed at them contemptuously.

'You've been talking about me, have you?'

His voice rang loud in a room that was suddenly silent. Everywhere heads had turned, and suddenly there was a creak as the door was pushed open. For a fleeting instant Robert turned his head and saw Joe in the doorway. He turned back at once, but behind him he heard Joe come to join him.

'Well? Tom's voice suddenly lifted higher. Haven't you a dam' thing to say for yourselves? Do you want to talk about me now?'

'No, we don't.' Halstead, at the side of the table, tried to speak with dignity. 'We weren't talking about you at all. We were talking about the beer, and that's what we'll go on talking about.'

'Then try that lot.'

Tom leaned forward, his hand swooping on a mug, and one vicious sweep sent a torrent of beer into Halstead's face. He reeled back, coughing and spluttering, while everywhere in the room the silence broke as men came jumping to their feet, craning their necks to watch.

'What's all this?' said Joe calmly.

'What the hell do you think it is?' Tom answered him with-

out looking round. 'It's these putting-out bastards.'

'Now that's enough.' At the other side of the table Sam Sutcliffe had suddenly found his voice, and he was quivering with anger. 'You keep a civil——'

'You damned halfpenny ronge-peddler!'

Ronge was the weavers' word for the odd lengths of weft that remained when a piece of cloth was woven. It properly belonged to the employer who had given it out, but peddling it for halfpennies was a petty embezzlement often done by the more poverty-stricken weavers. The insult was therefore obvious, and Sutcliffe's face went flaming red as he took it in.

'You blasted---'

He leaped towards the table, his arm diving for a beer mug, but he was too late. Tom was never slow at meeting trouble, and already he was moving to meet this one. His foot stamped, and then the whole of his weight was behind the swing of his shoulder as his fist went smashing into Sutcliffe's face. There was a yelp of pain, the clatter of falling chairs, and then a roar of voices as Sutcliffe went down, his nose spurting blood like a fountain. Lonsdale came jumping forward with a mug swinging in his hand, and Robert tripped him neatly. Joe took the moment to pick the last remaining mug from the table and pour it over Lonsdale, whom he disliked. Then he went thrusting forward in support of Tom.

The room was in an uproar. Halstead, his stock and shirt

soaked in beer, was coming furiously round the table. Lonsdale was struggling to his feet. Sutcliffe, with the blood still pouring down his face, was trying to get up. Tom stepped close, and a great open-handed slap sent Sutcliffe sprawling on the ground again. In the same moment Halstead arrived, and at once Joe was embroiled with both him and Lonsdale. Tom swung round to help Joe, and this time he did it with his boot. His kick sent Halstead hopping in agony, and Joe took the chance to round on Lonsdale with a vicious punch under the eye.

It had all come in a matter of seconds, and it was over as quickly. Other men had found their wits now, and they came surging forward to make an end of this. Robert, who had been behind Tom all the time, jumped to seize one of his arms, and to his intense relief he saw that Harry Holroyd had the other. Dick Sagar pushed himself in front of Joe, preventing a further attack on Lonsdale. Other men were helping Sutcliffe to his feet when Barnard Crook pushed himself into the centre of things. He was older than most of them, and more respected, and he now made use of that.

'We've had enough o' this,' he said firmly, and he was looking hard at Tom. 'I don't know what you think you're growing into, coming here like this and fratching like a lot of kids. It's downright disgusting.'

'Is it?' Tom was breathing hard now, and he seemed in no way pacified. 'I'm not having this sort of thing from a crowd of jumped-up shuttle-chuckers. Do you know what they've been doing?'

'I don't. And if these men have come up from being weavers, you've no call to throw it in their faces. You'd have come up the long way yourself, if your father hadn't done it for you.'

'He wouldn't,' said Lonsdale. 'He hasn't the brains.'

'Shut up,' said Joe, 'or I'll bash your other eye.' His tone and his angry glare swept Lonsdale into silence, and then Joe turned back to Crook. 'Now I wasn't in here when this started, so I'm saying nothing about that. But there are some things that aren't right, and this is one of 'em. Do you know what these men have been saying? Shouting it to every dam' Jack Weaver in the town?'

'That's right,' said Tom.

'Is it?' Lonsdale wheeled on him furiously. 'What do you think you're doing, you and Joe, with your steam engines and your power-looms? There's chaps like us who've been all our

lives coming up from t' bottom, and you're going to knock us down to where we started from. That's the size of it, and we're not dam' well having it.'

'No, we're not,' said Sutcliffe, 'and I don't care how big your

bloody fists are. We'll fight you to a finish.'

'If you want it that way you can have it that way. I can stand a good bit, but I won't stand chaps who try to set men against masters.' Tom paused for breath, and his eye swept contemptuously round the group. 'In twelve months' time there won't be a man left in Colne putting out to weavers, and that'll be the end of you. And as for getting back where you started——'

He stopped, still glaring at Sutcliffe, and he seemed to pause deliberately. Then his face pushed forward, and suddenly he spat heavily on the floor. He looked down at it, and then at

Sutcliffe again.

'Now,' he said. 'When you've licked that up you can come to me for a job.'

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FIFTY WEAVERS

By Next day, of course, the affair was the talk of the town. Nicholas heard of it in some manner of his own, and by ten o'clock he was in the counting-house demanding the details at first hand. Then he looked Robert straight in the eye and told him he would be wise to make clear to Anna, as soon as he decently could, how far he himself had been involved in the affair. Robert was willing enough, but it had to wait. With gas jets flaring through St. Helen's mill they now worked each night till seven o'clock, regardless of the weather, and visits to Greenfield, where Anna now was, had to wait till Saturday, when the mill shut down at five.

He went out to Greenfield on the Saturday evening, and he was quickly aware that something was wrong. Anna stayed in a frigid silence while John made him welcome and Susan added a word or two of her own. She gave the shortest of answers to his questions about her well-being, but she never took her eyes from him. It was all so unnatural, so new in Anna, that for the first time since he had known her he found his temper rising. He asked her bluntly what the trouble was.

'I should have thought that obvious,' came the answer.

'It isn't to me.'

He turned to John, almost in an appeal for help, and John did his best.

'It's this affair in the Hole i' th' Wall,' he said. 'I think Anna wants to hear about it.'

'I've heard about it,' said Anna.

'Then what's the trouble?'

'That is. Or more precisely——' She eyed him steadily for a moment. 'Robert, what I wish to know is, were you yourself mixed up in this brawl?'

'I certainly wasn't.' He answered her almost acidly. 'My part in that was to help in holding them apart.'

'Nick says you and Tom went there in company.'

'Yes.'

'But why?' For a moment her lip quivered unhappily. 'Robert, you didn't go there to start a brawl, did you?'

'Of course I didn't. We went there to find Joe Hoyle.'

'Then how did it become a brawl?'

John leaned forward, looking a little apprehensive. 'Must you keep using that word, Anna? It does seem to make the worst of things.'

'I don't know what other word to use, and I don't know how it can make things worse than they are. It seems to have been grown men fighting each other like small boys—and you, Robert, mixed up in that! How did it start?'

'I don't really know. In one sense, Thornber did it. He hit Sutcliffe, but he'd probably say that Sutcliffe was coming to attack him, and he merely got in first.'

'Why was Sutcliffe trying to attack him?'

'What Tom had said, I suppose.'

'Is it decent to tell me what that was?'

'Something about ronge-peddling. Of course the real trouble was the way these men had tried to set their weavers against us.'

'It doesn't seem to excuse fisticuffs. Or throwing beer at Halstead. Is that true, by the way?'

'I'm afraid it is. But Halstead's manner to Thornber-

'You seem to be excusing everybody. What hurts me is that

you were mixed up in it.'

It was at this point that John earned Robert's gratitude. He was the eldest among them, and safely married; and he could say what Robert would have been rash to say.

'Anna,' he said calmly, 'you're being silly.'

'John!' She jerked round suddenly. 'What do you mean?'

'I said silly. Or, at the least, you're being unreasonable.

You're also being uncharitable.'

For once, and for the only time Robert could remember, she was without an answer. She sat staring at him, evidently quite unused to this from quiet John Phillips. Then, without any haste, he pressed his point home.

'You're blaming these men for being what nature made them. What sort of upbringing do you think they've had?'

'I don't know.' Anna had recovered herself now, and she answered him steadily. 'I suppose they came up from the bottom.'

'They started on the handlooms, most of them, down in Waterside. Can you guess what it was like there, twenty years ago? How do you think a lad down there makes his way up to be a putter-out?'

'Tell me.'

'He kicks and fights. There's no other way. How do you think these few are different from the others?'

'I suppose they kicked and fought a little harder.'

'Exactly. They've perhaps a little money saved, and they've somehow scraped a little education—enough to sign their names and add the cash account. That's all. They're a rough lot, and you mustn't expect the graces from them.'

'But how about Tom? He didn't have to fight his way up.'

'His father did. He "came from nowt", as they say, just as the others did, and to this day he can just about sign his name. Of course he rose further than the others, and he was too busy doing it to have much thought for his son's upbringing.'

'Ellen seems civilized.'

'Girls take to it better than boys do, and Tom didn't have much chance. Nobody sent him out hunting.'

'John!'

'Wasn't that fair? But I'm trying to explain Tom. He had to take charge of that mill before he was twenty. That was when Nick left the partnership, and Tom had a pretty rough crowd to deal with. He dealt with them the only way he knew, and he's been too busy since then to learn any different ways.'

'It-it seems hard on Tom.'

"There's a lot that's hard in the cotton trade. But it isn't right to expect these men to behave as you would. Have I made it plain?"

'Very plain.' She was smiling ruefully now. 'I'm suitably humbled.'

'I didn't intend that, Anna. But are we all friends again?' 'Perfectly, thank you.'

She slipped back into silence. But later, when Robert was ready to go, John bade him good night and then stayed by the fire, leaving Anna to see him to the door. She stood watching while he put his coat on, and then, by the doorway, she came close to him. She spoke abruptly, more quickly than usual.

'Robert, I'm sorry. I ought to have known better.'

He heard the edge in her voice again, and in the candle-light he could see that her face looked strained. There was a little twist on her lip that he had not seen before, and he moved a little closer to her.

'It doesn't matter,' he said quickly. 'As long as you're satisfied now?'

'Of course I am.' She sounded impatient with that. 'It's becoming frightening. There's everyone I care for—you—and Nick, of course, up there in the middle of this, and every time I hear of it there's something worse.'

'It's all right, Anna.'

'It isn't all right.' Her two hands were suddenly in his, but she hardly seemed aware of it. 'I wish you were living down here with John and me. I'd think you were safer here.'

'There's a whole townful of people up there who---'

'They aren't all owning power-looms.' For a moment she tried to smile at him. I used to say you were to be careful, and not try to start till it was safe, but it seems too late to say that now.'

'Yes.'

There seemed no more to say. Or at least it was not to be said with words. They stood for a moment, eye to eye, reading more there than they could say, and then, without his eyer

knowing how, she was close against him and his lips had found hers. When at length he softened his hold on her she drooped her head, and the house seemed utterly silent. Only the slow tick of a clock gave hint of time, and his only thought was that she had clung to him as she had not done before.

Then, from the parlour, came the sounds of a poker, as if John were making the fire safe before bed; and it brought them

into Time again.

'I'd better say good night,' he whispered.

'Yes.' She pushed his hands aside as he was about to button his coat, and quietly she did it for him. 'You will be careful?'
'Of course.'

He kissed her again, quickly this time, and then she opened the door for him. On the threshold she held him back.

'I want news of what happens,' she said, 'and more often than once a week. I can't wait till every Saturday night.'

On the spur of the moment he did not see how best to arrange it. Then, suddenly, he heard her laugh softly.

'Leave it to me,' she said, and it was her own cool voice

again, 'I'll talk to Ellen, Good night!'

He walked home in the dark, and there was no thought in him but of Anna. The image of her stayed with him till he slept, and was with him again on the morrow, and a part of him was exultant in a soaring happiness. The other part of him was down to earth again, and he was asking gloomily what the weavers and the putters-out would next contrive. There were too many tempers frayed for trouble to wait much longer.

It came next morning, and it began at Vivary Bridge. This was Monday, one of the days on which Tom was a putter-out as well as a spinner. He received completed cloth on Mondays, paid for it, and gave out warp and weft for the coming week. He did this nowadays on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, since he now employed more weavers than he had used to do.

On this Monday there were some fifty weavers waiting with their cloth; and perhaps a hundred more, who were not employed by Tom, were standing outside the mill. These did not attempt to enter, but their very presence was enough to set Tom bristling. One look at them convinced him that they had come for no good reason, and he was in his truculent mood at once.

The men with the cloth stood in a group outside the shed in which he did this sort of work. It was usual for them to be

dealt with three at a time, and when the first three came to the counter, Tom made no comments. He kept strictly to business. Their cloth was inspected, passed, and paid for at the agreed rate of fourteen pence the piece. Warp and weft were given out for the coming week, and then it was time for the men to go. Tom had already turned away, his clerk was making the entries in the book, and the next three men were ready at the door. But the men with the hanks of yarn in their hands did not go. One of them stepped a pace forward. He said he was speaking on behalf of all the weavers; and he asked if it were true that they would soon be out of work at Vivary Bridge because of power-looms. His two fellows muttered support of what he said.

Tom exploded. He would have thought it impudence at any time for workmen to ask him how he meant to run his business; but at this moment, with fifty men at the door and another hundred outside the mill, he thought it more than that. He told them to mind their own business, and to keep on minding it. Then he shouted at them that he would employ them on piecework, or employ them on power-looms, or not employ them at all, exactly as he pleased, and it would be not at all if he had another piece of impudence from any one of them. He came storming round the counter as he spoke, and he snatched the hanks of yarn from all three of them, saying that if they had mended their manners by Friday they could come back and ask for work. Then he hustled their leader out of the shed; and when one of the others tried to linger he got a kick that sent him lurching through the door and into the crowd that waited.

The clerk, a quiet little man, admitted later that he was ready at that moment to dive under the counter. But somebody must have told the weavers what to do. They kept good order, and perhaps their first consideration was to get from Tom the money that was due to them for last week's work. Three by three, sullen and angry, they came to the counter to lay their cloth upon it. But each trio asked the same question about the power-looms, and each was hustled away with no more issue of warp and weft. Tom was uncompromising about it, grim and curt; but a man of more imagination might have wondered what was boded by this strange display of discipline in weavers.

What followed was unexpected, but it was a further proof that someone had been organizing this. Cloth from fifty men could not be seen in a few minutes, and nearly two hours had passed before the last of the weavers was paid. All this time there had been a steady trickle of men down the lane, and the hundred watchers had become five hundred when the last of the fifty emerged from the gate. They were in a ring now, all round the mill, and once or twice, when a spinner looked from an upper window, he was greeted with waving hands and a shouted jest. But that was all; and Tom, who was now stamping round the throstle rooms, stick in hand, found it all but impossible to keep his men at work. Shouting and booing they might have ignored, but this ring of silent watchers was somethink new, and it took their minds from their work. It was obvious now that the men outside were acting under orders. They were waiting for something.

Then, grotesquely improbable in the working hours of Monday morning, came the sound of music, the thudding of a drum and the lilt of marching time. Heads turned at once. There were cheers in the crowd, and then a general stir and movement as the Old Town Band came briskly down the curve of the lane, tattered and shabby, but marching as if they meant it. Tom pushed an upper window open as he heard the noise, and then stood staring in amazement while further proof was given that this had been pre-arranged. Banners were being unfurled and shaken out while a dozen men took command of everything, appointing themselves as marshals and shouting noisy orders. Under their directions the throng of swaying, pushing men was formed into a procession, headed by the band, and the order of it was significant. After the band came a dozen banners, each borne by two men, and bearing the inscriptions that might have been expected. Then came the fifty weavers who had handed in their cloth to Tom and been refused more work. After them came the remaining banners, followed by the whole five hundred out-at-elbow weavers. The procession paraded the few as the martyrs of the Cause, with a band and a marching escort.

Tom gaped at it from the window, and he even forgot his spinners, who had their faces pressed to the other windows. The drums banged, the cymbals crashed, the trombone grunted, and Joe Midgley's cornet went blaring to its highest note. The band stepped out as one, and behind them came the banners, the fifty weavers, and then the whole five hundred, shaking themselves into rhythm, picking up the step as they marched round the mill. Three times they made the circuit of it, while Tom went

raging furiously from room to room in his efforts to keep his cheering spinners at their work. The procession turned away as the band went tramping up Spring Lane, finding somehow breath for the climb and the music too. Tom had his spinners back to work at last, and he hurriedly sent a man to follow the procession and notice where it went.

He need hardly have done it. The sound of a band on Monday morning brought the whole town out to look. Straight up the street went the band, along into Market Street, and then. to everyone's surprise, into the little streets that ran down thence to Waterside. From one street to another went the procession. drums banging, banners swaving, feet tramping steadily, and now the purpose was plain. These were the little streets where the putting-out men had their workrooms, and at each of their rooms the procession stopped. It stopped always when the fifty heroes were against the workroom door, and at each of the rooms two of them went in and were given work for the coming week. They were being given here what they had been refused at Vivary Bridge, and all of them came out proudly from the workrooms swinging their hanks of yarn and holding them aloft for all to see. Then the procession went on. down now into Waterside, along it and up Colne Lane, and with a swaggering roll of drums it halted for the last time at Sutcliffe's workroom, just above Joe's factory. Here the last of the weavers were given the hanks of yarn, and Sutcliffe himself, with his nose still puffed and swollen, was out in the street to wave them on as the band gave the rhythm again. Up they went again into Market Street, then down once more to Waterside, and here, at the Admiral Rodney, the procession came quietly to an end. It stopped and dispersed, and somebody was seen buying beer for the band, but the whole town knew what it meant. The putters-out had ranged themselves against Tom Thornber: and their way of doing it was a declaration of war.

It was a tense and tight-lipped circle that met that night in the Hole i' th' Wall. The putters-out were not there, which was no doubt wise of them, but the others were all there, even Tom Thornber, though he rarely came at night. One after another, men spoke their feelings about what the putters-out had done, and there was not a dissentient voice. It was plain from the comments that the putters-out would have been forgiven a good deal, and that competition, of whatever sort and however bitter, would have been passed as fair and proper. But

they had done the one thing that was beyond the code. They had joined with the workmen against an employer, and that was unforgivable. They would never again be admitted to the employers' circle; and from the look on Tom's face there would have been fisticusts at once if any of them had come into the room just then.

It was Nicholas who first cut short the froth of talk. He had a mind that saw to the roots of things, and it was not his way to

waste much time at being indignant.

'What do you do next, Tom?' he asked. 'It lies with you, I think'

The buzz of talk died quickly as men recognized the tone.

They turned to Tom, and he did not hesitate.

'I'm waiting till Wednesday,' he said grimly. 'There's another fifty of 'em due then, and if they take their work as they should, that'll be all right. As for this lot today, I'm shut of them. They're out and they're not coming back, and that's final.'

'That'll leave you fifty men short. What'll you do?'

'Take another fifty.'

'Do you think they'll come?'
'What's fifty handloom men?'

'About fivepence—taking 'em at ten a penny. But it wasn't fifty Jack Weavers who thought this out.'

'No, it wasn't,' said Holroyd. 'It was that damned bag o'

lard, Sam Sutcliffe. Him and Lonsdale.'

'Never mind that. The point is, Tom, what are you going to do if it's the same on Wednesday?'

'You know dam' well what I'll do. I'll be shut of that fifty

too. Then I'll wait till Friday.'

'Fifty more on Friday?' Nicholas nodded. 'I don't want to upset you, but I don't think Sutcliffe and his friends will have forgotten Friday.'

'Nor more do I.'

'Then we'd better suppose you'll have the same trouble on

Friday.'

'Right.' Tom banged his clenched fist on the table with a force that sent the mugs splashing. 'Then I've done with 'em. I'm going right out o' the trade and I'm not paying another handloom man as long as I live. They can sit up and beg by the gate, and I won't let them in. I don't care what it costs me.'

The set of his jaw and the flush of his face left no doubt

that he meant it; and as if to drive the point home his fist banged on the table a second time.

'I'm fed up,' he snapped. 'If they think they're going to make fun out o' me, as they did this morning, they can laugh from t'other side o' their faces and I don't care who knows it.'

'That's right,' said Holroyd. 'Masters and men is what I say, and it takes your boot to let 'em know it.'

'The trouble is,' said Nicholas, 'that they've more boots than we have.'

'Aye, but we've the brass, as well as boots. They say money talks, and it can kick, too, if you know how to use it.'

Then Dick Sagar intervened. He was always slower than Holroyd, but he was a deal more thorough.

'Wait a minute,' he said. 'Stop talking about brass and boots, and talk about the next week or two. There'll be a hundred and fifty of Tom's weavers out o' work by the end of this week. What are they going to do?'

'They were given work,' said Holroyd. 'They were given it this morning, behind that dam' fool band, so they'll be working for t'other lot.'

'Not for long, they won't. Sutcliffe and his friends can't sell more cloth than they have been doing. The market isn't there, and the only way they can take more men is to make more cloth for the warehouse. Well, they can't do that, not for more than a week or two. They haven't the money.'

'Quite likely.' Nicholas spoke again now, and his face was tense with thought. 'But what are you getting at? If a man goes in, another comes out. That's what you mean, isn't it?'

'Aye, it is. One way and another, there's a hundred and fifty men coming out of work. And that's with pikes and bullets all over t' town, and not a soldier this side o' Burnley.' Again Sagar waited, while his eyes moved from one silent man to another. 'Mind you, it's us that's going to get the blame, not Sutcliffe and company. They've started all this, and now they're telling lies about it, but it'll be us. It'll be Tom first, because he turned 'em off, and then the rest of us because we back Tom. We're in a right mess, if you ask me.'

'It's probably where they meant us to be.' Nicholas nodded calmly. 'Are you telling us what to do about it?'

'We can't afford to have these men out of work. It's not safe, and we'll have to find 'em some. That's what I'm telling you.'

From round the room there were murmurs of dissent, and some of them sounded angry. Then a voice emerged above the others to speak what was in all their minds.

'We can't do that. If Tom turns his men off, we can't take

'em on.'

'I'm not saying we should take 'em on. It might be the easiest, but we can't do it. I know that.'

'But you've just said--'

'I said we must find 'em some work. I didn't say handloom work.'

'Wait.' Nicholas spoke sharply, checking the buzz of talk that was breaking out. 'Let's hear this. Dick's trying to tell us

something.'

'Right.' Again Sagar looked round them all, and then he spoke with a dogged earnestness. 'All this turned up, Tom, because of those power-looms of yours. You want to run 'em, and the putters-out say you shan't. Isn't that it?'

'That's it.'

'Well, run 'em. And we'll all stand with you.'

'Steady!' Even Nicholas seemed startled, and it took a sharp wave of his hand to keep the silence in the room. 'If there's one sort of work the handloom men won't have, it's powerlooms.'

'I don't believe it. I know they don't like it, but that doesn't matter. They didn't like digging for the Gas Company, but they dug. And they'll tent power-looms, if they have to.'

'You might be right.'

'I know I am. But do you see it?' He swung round suddenly, appealing to the whole circle. 'It's us against the putters-out. They're saying that Tom shan't have his power-looms, and nobody else shall either. Right! We'll show 'em.'

'How?' said Nicholas.

'Power-looms in the town means men kept in work, and that's the end of one trouble. More than that, as soon as we start power looms, the putters-out are on the run. It won't be long then before they're finished. And they know it.'

For a long moment he waited. Every eye was on him and the silence was tense. Then he added the word that clinched it.

'When one man starts, the rest of us can follow. And there's money in power-looms.'

The voices came suddenly, a roar of approval, perhaps

tinged with surprise that stolid Dick Sagar should have seen it so clearly. Nicholas nodded calmly.

'We're all with you there,' he said. 'But how's it to be done? I can see a difficulty or two.'

'It'll cost us a bit of money, I know, but it'll cost us a sight more in the end if we don't. That's what I'm telling you. Now, what do you say, Tom? Are you willing?'

'I'm willing enough, but I can't start looms this week. I haven't my shed up yet.'

'Say in a month's time, when they've started to pull their belts in?'

'It's a bit soon, if I have to build the place. I'm not so sure about selling cloth either. I'd like to think about this.'

'We'll help you where it pinches. But wait a minute.' Again Sagar turned, and now it was to Joe Hoyle. 'I don't like nosing into another man's business, Joe, but it doesn't seem much of a secret about you and Shaw. Is it right?'

'Yes.'

Joe answered quietly, and there was nothing flamboyant about him now. Sagar nodded.

'The more looms the better, so it's you as well as Tom. When can you start?'

'Better ask Robert.'

Sagar swung round without a word, his eyes putting the question, and Robert steadied his breath. He was suddenly aware that it was not Dick Sagar only. Every eye in the room was on him now.

'So far as looms go, I could be ready in a month. I could do it in less than that. But you might remember that there isn't a hand in Colne who can tent a power-loom. They'll have to be taught, and we shan't do that in half a day.'

'They're weavers, and it's only one sort of loom for another. Anything else?'

'What Tom said. I don't know yet how to sell the cloth.'

'Right.' Sagar sounded now as if he were in command, and he addressed the whole circle. 'Now if these men start before they meant to, it's our battle they're fighting and we'll have to back 'em up. The main trouble's going to be to sell their cloth, and we'll have to help. We'll have to take a few pieces ourselves, at a proper price.'

'What the heck do we do with it?' asked Holroyd.

'You put it in your warehouse and you sell it when you can. It's the price you pay for helping. Now then, who'll offer? Barney, what about you? You're in the trade?'

Barnard Crook had sat through it all in his usual silence. Even now he did not speak at once. He rubbed his nose thoughtfully as he considered it.

'I've about four hundred pieces in the warehouse that I can't sell. At least, not to get my money back. But I don't like to stand out of this. I'll take a hundred pieces a month for six months.'

'Well done! I'm not in that trade myself, and I can't do as much, but I'll take fifty a month for six months.'

'I'll do the same,' said Nicholas.

'Right. What about you, Harry? Fifty, is it?'

'Call it forty,' said Holroyd.

'Right. Any more?'

He had a half dozen lesser offers, and then he summed it up.

'About two thousand pieces, over six months,' he said. 'It's not a lot, but it'll make a difference. Now, Tom, what do you say?'

'Don't try to rush it too much.' The note of obstinacy was in Tom's voice now. 'I've a shed to build yet, and my looms to put in. I've to find my loomers, set up looms, and train the hands. It's dam' silly to talk about a month.'

'We'll have to show we can get things done. We don't want Sutcliffe thinking it's funny.'

'Funny!' Tom's face flushed a shade redder. 'He's going to laugh on the wrong side of his face soon.'

'How soon?'

'Eh?' The flush deepened, and then the big jaw stiffened angrily. 'I'll start my shed next week, and then I'll do my best. I can't say any more.'

'Well, I hope you do better than you're talking. Joe, what about you and Shaw?'

Every eye was on Robert again, and suddenly he was aware of forces loose in the room. Something had been roused in these angry men, and Sagar had given it point and thrust. It was a pressure not to be denied, and the power to choose was no longer his.

'We've a lot to do,' he answered carefully, 'and there are

some things I don't think safe. But we'll match Thornber.'

He looked round him, meeting their eyes and feeling again the force in the room.

'Perhaps—perhaps we'll do a little better than that.'

31

THE ADVISERS

ROBERT was awake that night, thinking and worrying. There could be no going back on what had been agreed, and already Joe was trying to drive it forward; but Shaw & Hoyle was a side issue to Joe. It was not his livelihood. What mattered most to Joe was the goodwill of the wealthier men on whom he depended for the information he could so often put to profit, and it was evident that he was all for driving forward as they expected him to do. He had already offered to advance whatever further money was needed for the early start, and he seemed quite willing to take any risks there might be of trouble with the weavers. It was well enough in a way; but to Robert, who had put the last penny of his savings into Shaw & Hoyle. some other thoughts were bound to occur. It would be sheer disaster to him if the firm were to come to ruin, and his partner began to seem now like a runaway horse whose efforts can upset the coach. He was grateful for the extra pull; but he was worried, and he was uncomfortably aware that whatever was needed of careful judgment would have to come from himself.

He thought there were perhaps three men who could help him. Nicholas could be relied on for some nice appraisements. Dick Bradley would do anything he could, which might not be much; and Barnard Crook, who was older and wiser than any of them, would no doubt give his sage advice again if he were asked for it. Robert turned it over and over, and decided that that was all. He forgot some humbler folk whose staunchness and hard good sense were to be invaluable; and, most of all, he forgot Anna.

But he had still a little time. The chance still existed that the rest of Tom's weavers would take their work peacefully on Wednesday and Friday, and the plan to begin the power-looms was therefore to be kept a secret until Friday. Tom would give the signal when he had dealt with the last of his weavers, and it had been agreed that no one should make an open move till then. There was thus some time for thought and talk, and Robert began the talk next morning. He told Dick Bradley all about it, and Nicholas walked into the counting-house to find them discussing the affair. An eyebrow went up at once.

'Telling Dick about it, are you? In confidence, I suppose?

Well, what's your problem?'

'I wish I knew. Which of them comes first?'

'How to sell your cloth,' Nicholas answered instantly. Then, after a pause, he began to speak deliberately. You'll find before long that nothing matters very much in the cotton trade except that. Spinning your yarn or weaving your cloth isn't really difficult. It doesn't set up troubles you can't get over. But selling the stuff's different, and if you can do that you can make money. If you can't, you'll be sold up, and you'd better think of that first, last and all the time, as long as you're in this trade. You'd better think first, not afterwards, by the way.'

'What does that mean?'

'Find out what there's a market for, and then make it. Don't go making what you've a fancy for, and then ask if there's a market. Pretty often there isn't.' He nodded and walked to the door. 'Let me know if I can help.'

He went off to his own room, and Robert looked thought-

fully at Dick.

'How does one sell cloth?' he asked.

'It's a Manchester market, mostly, but I don't know much about it. I've been selling yarn, not cloth, since I came here. I could find out, of course.'

'I wish you would. Is there anyone else who could tell me anything?'

'Barnard Crook. He has to buy for his shop, so he ought to know the wholesale market.'

Crook was in the Hole i' th' Wall that night, making pretence

with a mug of beer, and doing much more listening than talking. He was willing enough to sit aside with Robert, and he quickly made it plain that he agreed with Nicholas.

'He's right,' he said briefly. 'There's a new firm set up every day. They're up like mushrooms, and down about as quick, and it's the same tale with all of 'em. They've made what they can't sell, and the county's littered with bankrupt stock—and men tenting looms who were masters a year ago. So Nick's right. You watch your selling, and the rest of it'll pretty near watch itself.'

'Not quite, though.'

'I didn't say quite. I don't know anything in the cotton trade that can quite watch itself.'

'Well, I don't see how I'm to watch all the things that can't watch themselves, and at the same time be in Manchester selling cloth.'

'No, and you'd better not try to. I've known a few that went near mad, trying to do two jobs at once. Your partner's no use, I suppose?'

'Joe?'

'No. I suppose he isn't.' Crook spoke reflectively. 'He'd just walk through the shop and use his boot if he thought there was a man not working. You'll have to watch it yourself.'

'Then who's to sell the cloth?'

'Looks like Bradley, from what you've been saying.'

'I thought you called it my first concern?'

'That doesn't mean you must do it yourself. It just means you must see it gets done.'

'I'd sooner do it myself.'

'It looks as if you can't. But how about paying him? He's Nick's man, you know, not yours. I know he's done things for you in Manchester before, but that was just now and then, and if it's to become a steady thing, week after week, you can't expect another firm to pay for it. You'll have to come to terms with Nick about it, and I don't think he'll be difficult.'

'He never is.'

'Well, you might have been lucky, Anyway, try him and see.'
Robert tried him the next morning, and Nicholas was
obviously thinking of the news that had just come from Vivary
Bridge. This was Wednesday morning, and Tom had sent a
brief message that his second lot of weavers had behaved like
the first. There had been no band this time, but the fifty dis-

missed men had been escorted away by a crowd of several hundred. That was as much as Tom yet knew, but it was enough to show that there had been no change of plan. It would be the same on Friday, said Nicholas, and he had no doubt that the men were now being given work by Sutcliffe and the others.

Then he came down to business. He raised an eyebrow at the suggestion that Dick should henceforth be partly in his employ and partly in that of Shaw & Hoyle, but he made one of his quick decisions and agreed to it. Then he came back to what was immediate. It looked, he said, as if, instead of having two clerks, he would soon only have half of one; and when did Robert mean to leave him? Robert answered that he did not know, but that he would like, from now on, to give only half his time to the work, at half pay, and give the other half to Shaw & Hoyle. Nicholas nodded, and said he had now only two half-clerks. He had better find another whole one to make up the difference. The further details could be sorted out later.

That was not the last of Nicholas for the day. Towards the end of the morning a message came down from Ellen at Cumberland House. Anna, she said, would be with them for dinner, and they would be glad if Robert would join them. Robert agreed willingly enough; and began to understand what Anna had meant when she said she would talk to Ellen.

He walked up with Nicholas, and it soon appeared that Anna had something more in mind than a general wish for news. John Phillips, she said, had been in the town yesterday afternoon, and from the talk in the King's Head he had learned that power-looms were to be started in a month by Shaw & Hoyle. She looked worried as she asked what it meant.

'Well, I'm damned!' said Nicholas. 'I knew there'd be folk who wouldn't keep shut about it, but I didn't think it would be out quite so quick.'

'But what's it about?' said Anna.

They told her part of it over dinner, but they had to be careful. All the children were at the table, and what had been agreed in the Hole i' th' Wall was not talk for this full company. Anna had to wait a little longer, and Robert said he would leave early that night and walk out to Greenfield to tell her more. Then, feeling no longer bound to strict secrecy about what could be heard in the King's Head, he took time that afternoon for a talk with Tom Ogden, the loomer. He told the

whole tale of what had been agreed, and Tom whistled quietly when he grasped its meaning. Then he showed that he had a grasp of other things.

'You'll need your tackler,' he said firmly. 'Or you might need

two.'

'So soon?'

'If you want to start in a month.' Tom looked round him with an alert eye. 'Two hundred and eight looms, and we've put about twenty of 'em up. Putting the rest of 'em up in a month is a job for a proper tackler. He'll do it quicker than me and Jack can. Besides, it's time I was looming.'

He meant the complicated setting of the warp into the looms ready for weaving, and Robert nodded.

'I'll see about a tackler at once. Then you can turn to your own trade.'

'What am I to set up for?'

'I'm not sure yet. I'm still inquiring into the market.'

'I can't set up till I know what you're going to weave, can I?'

'No.' Again Robert spoke shortly as the irritating truth drove in that he had once again been caught unready. 'I'll find out as soon as I can for you.'

'Right. How about your engine tenter?'

'We shan't need him just yet.'

'Not this week, we shan't.' Tom had the calm voice of a man who knows what he is talking about. 'But when you've your tackler working, and he's put a few looms ready, he'll need the power. He'll want to run 'em for a day, not ten minutes, before he hands 'em to me.'

Again it was the voice of experience, and again Robert held himself still as he wondered how to deal with a man who knew more than he did. Then another view of it came, and suddenly he was thankful that Tom had this knowledge, and was so ready to share it with him. It was exactly what he needed.

'Thanks,' he said quickly. 'I'll think about the engine tenter.'

'Don't be too long thinking. Now, what about tenting looms? When do we take the hands on?'

'It's something I wanted to ask you about. I wanted to use women for the looms, but I'm afraid it'll have to be men. How big a nuisance is that going to be?'

'You can't say.' Tom scratched his head in perplexity. 'I don't know anyone more damn pigheaded than a handloom

man. I've seen tacklers pretty nigh driven to drink by those chaps.'

'Not all of them?'

'They didn't all need driving.'

'I don't mean the tacklers.'

'Oh, the weavers? Well, there's one now and then you can show something to. Down at bottom, of course, it's a matter of changing their ways, and that's like teaching a cow to play the fiddle.'

'Then what do we do?'

'Pick the best you can, and then go on changing 'em till you get a few you can talk to. It's the only way.'

'All right, then. How long shall we need them before they're

fit to weave cloth?'

'Give the gypsy sixpence. She'll tell you better than I can.'

Robert let it go at that. He went in search of Joe. and he took a confident tone as he explained that wages would now have to be paid to a tackler and an engine tenter. There was also one-third of Dick Bradley's wage, which was henceforth to be paid by Shaw & Hoyle, together with a share of his travelling expenses. Joe totted it up and looked worried. Robert told him it was not to be avoided if they were to open the firm as they had promised to, and that was check to Joe. He grumbled, but he said he would find the money. Robert remembered the next problem, and went after Sam Hartley.

But Sam was busy, and Robert decided that this could wait till tomorrow. He had something better to do at the moment, and by five o'clock he was out of the mill and walking through the February dusk. Anna had told him that in these days they had tea at half past five, which had been a plain enough hint that he should be with them at that time if he could. He managed it with some minutes to spare, and John made him quietly welcome. Then tea was ready, and Anna had arranged that the children should be elsewhere, so that Robert could tell them over the meal what had really been decided in the Hole i' th' Wall. He spoke with care, and Susan was the first to say that she wished him all success. Something, she added, would certainly have to be done if putters-out behaved like this.

But later, when Susan had left them for a while, it was Anna's turn. She was looking thoughtful, but there was a wry smile on

her face as she spoke.

'I've kept saying you mustn't be in a hurry to start. I can

hardly say that any more.' The smile became a little clearer. 'All I can do is to wish you well.'

She sank into silence again, while John had his word.

'You're satisfied with the way it goes?' he asked.

'I think so. Of course, I've forgotten things, and I expect I'll do some other things badly. But on the whole I think we can be ready by the time we're wanted.'

'Then what's the trouble?'

'If we put a notice on the door, saying we're ready to take on hands, what will happen? We may have a crowd of men next morning, or we may have a riot. That's the worry, and there's nothing to judge it by.'

'But the men want work, don't they?'

'There'll be plenty who want it in a month or two, if Sagar's right. Sutcliffe and his friends are giving work at present to a hundred and fifty of Thornber's men, but Sagar says they can't go on doing it. They haven't the money.'

'He's probably right.'

'In that case there'll be plenty of them wanting work. But the fact remains that they don't like power-looms. It's a question of men, you see, and I don't know which way it will go.'

'Ye-es.' John spoke in slow thought. 'I suppose a man might wish to take your work, and yet feel he musn't because his fellows disapprove?'

'Exactly. So what can I do?'

'I doubt if you can do anything. As you say, it's a question of men.'

'Is it?' said Anna quietly.

'I beg your pardon?'

Robert's head turned to her in surprise, and her quick smile showed her perception of that. The she spoke gravely.

'You say it's a question of men. Mightn't it be women too?'

'I'm afraid that won't work,' said John. 'He can't employ women after what was---'

'I'm not suggesting that he should.'

'Then I don't understand you.'

'I'm afraid you don't.' For a moment there was a hint of exasperation in her voice, but she suppressed it quickly. She turned to Robert, and had the air of trying again. 'I suppose most of these men are married? Couldn't their wives have any importance?'

'I don't see what they have to do with this.'

'No?' Again, for an instant, the exasperation showed. 'You're not showing much imagination, Robert, if you don't mind me saying so.'

'I don't in the least mind your saying so. But I still don't see

what it's all about.'

'Then we'll try again. You seemed to think that a lot of these men might want the work and yet think they ought to refuse it. If it's as nicely balanced as that, couldn't the wives tip the scale?'

'In a matter of work? Do you think the men would listen?'

'Some wives have tongues.'

'Yes, but---'

'How many weavers are out of work in the town?'

'Perhaps a thousand.'

'How many do you need?'

'About a hundred. We think a man can tent two looms.'

'If one wife in ten can talk to her husband? Believe me, Robert, it's more than that.'

'I expect so. But——' He was still trying to catch the meaning of this. 'Why should you think that the wives will see it differently than the men?'

'They're more practical.'

'Really, Anna!'

'Oh yes, they are.' Her retort came instantly, but a little quiver underlay the firmness of her voice. 'They've been near starving this last year or two, with precious little work and a shilling from the Poor Law. Who had to make do? Who had to spread the shilling round the family? Who had to boil those nettles you spoke of?'

'Well, I-I suppose---'

'You're right this time. It's mother, not father, that the children turn to when they're hungry, and it was mother who had to tell them there was nothing left—and then do her best with them when they cried. Do you think she's forgotten?'

'Please, Anna!'

'I'm sorry.' She spoke quickly, and then she was looking at him ruefully. 'I'm afraid I was getting a little worked up. It's rather hard not to, sometimes. But don't tell me the women won't have something to say.'

'Very well.' He tried to speak easily. 'I'll believe that. But I still don't see what they will say.'

'I don't want you to think I'm trying to teach you your business.'

'I'd still like to know what you have in mind.'

'I mean that if you seem to be a good firm to work for, you'll get the men. The wives will see to that, or enough of them will. They'll put first things first, and the first will be a good firm to work for. They won't much mind whether it's power-looms or not, if the man's decently treated and brings his money home.'

'That's probably true,' said John quietly. 'I try to treat my own men well, but I hadn't thought of the wives having something to do with it. Perhaps you'd better have them on your side.'

'How do I get them there?'

'Ask Anna.'

'Oh dear!' She was smiling at them suddenly. 'You're pressing me, John. But I should say it's a matter of showing from the beginning that this is something better than the putters-out will ever give. That means——' She turned quickly, to look Robert in the eye. 'It means avoiding the mistake that Joe will want to make.'

'What is that?'

'He will want to pay them the very least wage they can be made to take.'

'I'm afraid that's usual, Anna, in business.'

'Does that make it right?'

'Right?'

'Yes, Robert. Right. Something your chapel would approve of.' She was suddenly urgent, and she waited a moment for the point to sink in. 'If you pay a man what he ought to have, instead of what he can be made to take, you might have the name of a good firm. Which is what I've been talking about all the time.'

'Well, I-I'll think about it, Anna.'

'I'll add something else, if I may?'

'Yes?'

'Pay on the proper day.'

'Of course I shall.'

'There's no "of course" about it, from what I've heard. What is the proper day?'

'It's usually Saturday.'

'And when Saturday comes they make excuses, and the men

aren't paid. It may be Monday or Tuesday before they get their money, and how are the wives to manage through the week-end, and give them Sunday dinner, if they can't go marketing? If I were a weaver's wife I'd count it a big point if the firm paid when it should.'

'All right. I'll see to that.'

'Do,' said John quietly. 'She's certainly right about it. Is there anything more, Anna?'

'No. I've talked far too much already, but I'll be quiet for a

bit now. It'll be safer.'

She spoke with a smile, but some underlying thought must have stayed with her. She came back to it an hour later when she walked to the outer door with him.

'You won't think I'm interfering too much?' she said.

'No. It's going to be useful.'

'I hope so. I do hope so.' She laid her hand quietly on his arm. 'I think it means as much to me as it does to you, to make this work. Or nearly as much.'

'So it should.' The throb of excitement was suddenly in him again. 'Can't we talk now of what it could mean if it does

work?'

'I think you'd better keep your mind on what you're doing. Besides, there's only a door between us and John.'

'Well, yes. But---'

'I'll give you some news. It will be another month or so before I've finished with Susan.'

'Yes?'

'Nick said today that when I leave here he'd like me to go to him for as long as I please. Let the rest of the family whistle, was how he put it. Ellen said the same.'

'Oh?'

'I told John, and he said that when I was tired of Nick I could come back here, also for as long as I please. So it does look as if I may be in the town for some time, and I really do think you'd better keep your mind on what you're doing.'

'I mean to. But---'

'I'm not going to encourage you not to. It's too important—perhaps for both of us.' Her face became suddenly graver. 'You really must give every bit of your mind to it, and none at all to me.'

'But it's only for the moment, Anna, not for ever?'

'I didn't say for ever.' She moved closer to him, looking up

at him gravely. 'It can be done, and if anyone can do it, you can. I'm sure of that.'

'Do you really mean that?'

'Robert, I'm not being silly. Of course I mean it.'

'It may need some scrap of luck, though.'

'Most things do. It will be all right.'

'If I don't make a mistake.'

'Why should you?'

'Anybody can. And I have the feeling that one good mistake could end this business. There might be no second chance.'

'I hope not.'

'Hope?'

'Of course.' Her hand pressed suddenly on his arm again. 'Why do you suppose the mistake need be yours. Couldn't the other men make it first? That's a lot more likely.'

'But---'

'Good night. And don't lose your heart. At least——' She laughed softly. 'Not that way.'

32

THE MOMENT

For a day or two longer the quiet continued, but it was an uneasy quiet and no one thought it would last. On the Friday the last of Tom's weavers took their money and went trooping up to the town to have their next week's work from the Sutcliffe group, and Tom wasted no more time. He sent a brief note to Robert to give the news, and then he came swinging up the street with a roll of papers under his arm. These were the long prepared plans for his weaving shed, and he took them to six different builders, all of them desperate for work. He was peremptory about it, and they were all at Vivary

Bridge that same afternoon, looking at the ground, and by the next afternoon the last of their tenders had been delivered. Tom came to agreement on Monday morning. He put a ferocious time-limit into the contract, and the chosen builder was on the site within an hour, pegging the ground and laying the strings for the foundation trenches. Tom made no attempt to hide the purpose of it. He was quite willing to tell everybody.

Robert spent that Monday afternoon with Harry Hartley, who had been hastily summoned from Blackburn. He was very like his brother, with the same stocky figure, the broad chest, and the twinkling eyes that could be so firm and confident. He even had the trick of running his fingers through his hair, and all in all he was so like Sam that Robert was soon well satisfied. The appointment of Harry as head tackler was quickly made, and another minute brought agreement that he should be ready for his new work the following Monday.

Robert thought that was all, but his tackler took a different

view.

'I can't do all these looms myself, you know. I'll need another tackler with me.'

'And another loomer for me,' said Tom Ogden. 'That's

young Jack, so you want two more reachers-in.'

'Very well.' Once again Robert was unready, but he was growing used to giving firm answers to this sort of thing. 'I'll see about those. Is there anything else?'

'When does your engine start?' asked the tackler. 'We'll need it soon.'

It was exactly what Tom had said, and Robert went off to talk to Joe, who might know something of engine tenters. But he could not entirely solve the problem.

'They're hard to come by,' he said. 'There aren't many engines, so there aren't many tenters. You'll have to take a chap who's been a tenter's mate, shovelling coals and such like. There'll be some of those, if you look.'

Robert went back to St. Helen's mill, where the engine was at work because of ice in the river, and he fell into talk with Amos Smith. They talked in the comfortable warmth of the engine-house, where the wisps of steam were rising and the two iron flywheels whirling. Outside, in the unfilled archway of the boiler-house, young Jack o' Dick's was busy with rake

and shovel, and the red glow of the fire was vivid in the afternoon light.

'Aye,' said Amos, when he had considered. 'I think you might take him. I've known 'em worse.'

'Well, if you think he's all right---

'That's to say, if Mr. England will let him go.'

There was no difficulty about that. Nicholas, consulted about it next morning, was still in his obliging mood. Somebody else, he said, could be had to shovel coals, and Robert might by all means have Jack o' Dick's. So Jack was promoted tenter, and told that in his new dignity he had better be known henceforth by his proper name, which, after a little thought, he said was Tattersall.

Dick Bradley came back from Manchester that afternoon, and he seemed quietly pleased with himself. He had met half a dozen cloth merchants, and he thought he could sell cloth to each of them, provided that it was cheap enough. He quoted them all as saying that in the present state, with all trades bad and everybody short of money, it was the cheapest sorts, such as greycloth, that could best be sold. Nobody had money to buy the expensive sorts. Robert told Tom Ogden to set up the looms accordingly, and he began to feel that they were making progress.

It was at this juncture that Nicholas went off to Manchester for a meeting of the Anti-Corn-Law Association, and trouble started within an hour of his going. Tom's builders had been busy throughout Tuesday, his spinners had kept an interested watch through the windows, and by evening the whole town knew what had been going on. On this Wednesday morning, when the builders were laying the first courses of the walls, a stream of men began to come down to see it for themselves, and they were plainly in a mood for trouble. They pressed to the gate of the mill and began to shout angrily for Tom Thornber, and somebody had sense enough to open a window and tell them Tom was not there. He had gone to Manchester by the early coach.

He had, in fact, been in the same coach as Nicholas, to the surprise of both of them. But what mattered at the moment was that he had gone, and that was perhaps fortunate. His presence, with his bellicose humours and his shotgun, might have been more dangerous than his absence, which left the

weavers with nothing much to shout about. They stood irresolute until one of their number told them what to do. This was Jack Pickles, an out-and-out Chartist, much noted for speaking at corners, and he shouted to them that if there was nothing for them at Thornbers they might as well go to Hoyle's, where power-looms were ready and waiting. There was plenty they could do at Hoyle's.

That was enough for the weavers. In ten minutes' time they were gone, and there was peace for the builders at Vivary Bridge; but in another half-hour a noisy jostling crowd had filled Colne Lane from end to end, and Joe in his factory was

under siege, or something near it.

But Jack Pickles, whatever his talents as a speaker, was no strategist, and Joe had been busy lately. His doors were of the stoutest, strongly locked and double-bolted. All his windows were barred; and in the last week, with a belief that some stones would fly before all was done, he had stretched wire netting across the bars. The exposed parts of the roof had netting too, and even the goods door between the upper windows, with the beam and pulley above it for the hoisting of bales, had been provided with extra bolts. If there was a building in Colne that could stand a near-siege, this was it, and Joe was therefore not much perturbed when the crowd came shouting under his windows. He made it plain to his men that a little matter of this sort was no excuse for stopping work. Then he went to the upper floor, where Tom Ogden and his reacher-in were steadily fitting threads to a loom, and through the barred and bolted windows he looked at the scene outside.

It was Jack Pickles, more than Joe, who was now in trouble. He had brought the men here from Vivary Bridge, and they were finding nothing more to do than throw stones at unresponsive netting. They were tired of it already, and they were looking at Pickles for the promised lead. Joe, watching carefully through the windows, was sure that Pickles had no lead to give. The man looked baffled.

Joe watched placidly. Opposite him was the Inghamite chapel, surrounded by a low wall, and suddenly Pickles jumped on the wall and began to speak. Joe moved to the goods door, under the beam and pulley, unbolted the upper half, which was separately hinged, and swung it open. Then he calmly leaned out and listened.

It was much what he had expected. Pickles was making a speech about the Charter, the National Rent, and the iniquity of power-looms. It might have come straight from the Northern Star, and probably had, and already his hearers were becoming restive. There were some shouted questions and a jest or two, and a few men turned their backs and walked away. Pickles was perhaps not as popular as he thought he was, and Joe made due note of that. Then he leaned a little farther out.

'Morning!' he called cheerfully.

There was a sharp noise of clogs as men swung round. Pickles was cut short in a frothing sentence, and he stood for a moment gaping.

'Were you saying something?' said Joe.

'Aye, I was.' Pickles spoke in an angry shout as he saw that he must either fight for his audience or be a jest in every beerhouse. 'And I've some more to say yet.'

'Would you like a drop o' beer?'

'Not from you.' The voice rose higher as a ripple of laughter came from the crowd. 'I'll have nothing from a chap who takes t' bread from working men.'

'Did you mean yourself?'

'I mean you and your damned power-looms.' The man turned suddenly, his arms outspread in a gesture. 'Listen, brothers—'

'I can't hear you,' said Joe. 'Come a bit closer.'

'What!' Pickles stood speechless for a moment. Then he jumped from the wall and began to push his way across the street. 'I'll come a sight closer, before I've done.'

'That's right.'

'Now you listen——' Pickles was close to the factory now, under the door where Joe leaned out. 'I'm telling you of the Rights of Man, and it's time someone did. We know what it means to be working——'

Joe disappeared, and another titter of laughter came from the crowd as Pickles was left in his full flood of talk to an empty door. He rounded on them furiously.

'Funny, isn't it? You'll find it a dam' sight funnier when—-'
'Are you there?' said Joe.

Pickles whipped round recklessly, his head flung back and

his face upturned to look; and Joe, whose sanitary arrangements were primitive, leaned out and emptied a pot over him.

The result was startling. There was a gasp, then an instant of silence, then a gale of laughter that swept through the street like a roaring wind, utterly drowning whatever the soused and reeking Pickles was trying to splutter out. He turned madly to the crowd, and the laughter took impetus from that. Men at the back jumped high on walls to see him better, and a host of ribald voices called advice to him. Then suddenly he gave it up, and he began to use his elbows as he pushed his way down to Waterside, where he lived. They opened a lane for him, cheering as he made his way, and then they followed and went with him, pitiless in their noisy laughter.

It was at this juncture that the Fates took a hand, and in a matter of a single minute they transformed the scene. Time had been slipping by, more of it than anyone had noticed in this medley of a morning, and it was exactly twelve o'clock as the swarm of men came to the foot of the slope and found the green in front of them. Prompt to the instant a plume of steam leaped from the whistle at St. Helen's mill, and the piercing howl told that the dinner hour had come. No spinner ever needed to hear that twice, and the noise had hardly died when men were streaming out, heads erect and clogs clattering as they began the hurried rush to dinner. As they did so, they collided with the other crowd, four or five times their number, who had come from Colne Lane, and for a moment it was utter confusion. The spinners, not understanding the crowd, were trying to push their way through; and the crowd, still in the mood for something they could call a joke, took it into their heads to stop them. They began to link arms and bar the way, and the hungry spinners saw nothing funny in this.

Somebody took swift advantage of it. There were others in that crowd besides Jack Pickles who liked to speak at corners, and one of them saw that here was an audience ready for him. He leaped on a wall, let out a bellow of a shout to take attention, and then began. He was probably shrewder than Pickles, and he wasted no time in pouring out what everyone had read in the Northern Star. He addressed himself to the spinners, and he told them he spoke on behalf of the starving fellowworkmen they could now see round them. He was unblushing when he said that he and his fellows had come to ask fraternal

help from the spinners. The weavers gave him a round of cheers, and the spinners thought they could do no less than listen for a minute. They hitched at their belts and tried to look attentive.

The man was shrewd enough to know that his time was short, and he came at once to his theme. The power-looms, he shouted, would send him and his comrades to the workhouse, and the power-looms were at Hoyle's. But there was a man called Shaw at St. Helen's mill, and that was why he and his friends had come down here to see the spinners. Didn't everybody know that Shaw had a hand in the power-looms too? Was he not Joe Hoyle's partner? There was a plot to rob the weavers of their work, and Shaw was the leader of it. What did the spinners say to that?

It was at this moment that Robert came out of St. Helen's mill in search of his own dinner. He had Dick Bradley with him, as usual, and it happened that Sam Hartley was with them also. None of them yet knew of the events of the morning, and they had therefore no explanation of the crowd they saw in front of them. Sam, whose home was across the river and who would normally have turned away at this point, stopped short as he saw it.

'Eh, what's this?' he said. 'What's yon chap shoutin' about?'
They moved forward to find out, and before they had gone
fifty yards they knew exactly what he was shouting about. He
was shouting about power-looms and Robert Shaw, and at that
moment he saw them. He stood staring for a moment. Then
he flung out an accusing arm and pointed.

'That's the man,' he shouted. 'That's Shaw. Have a good look at him. In another month he'll have his pocket full o' the weavers' bread, the last crumb that's left. Aye, look at him.'

The crowd swung round as one man. The heated words had not been without effect, and there were some hard faces among them now. Robert stood very still, uncomfortably aware of the thousand eyes that were intent upon him; and suddenly, from somewhere in the crowd, a fistful of mud was thrown. It pitched at his feet, spattering up against his coat and face, and there was an ominous muttering as the crowd surged closer.

'Aye, look at him,' cried the man on the wall again. 'An' a bit more mud won't harm.'

It came hurtling from three directions at once, and Robert

had to leap hurriedly to dodge it. A lump of it splashed against his face, and he had to wipe it quickly from his eye.

'Better get out of this,' said Dick. 'They'll get worse.'

But Robert made no answer. The mud in his face had brought his temper rising quickly. He was also remembering that he was soon to be an employer of weavers, and he knew only too well what they would think if they saw him run for it. Then another shower of mud came spattering, and there was a derisive laugh from the crowd.

'Come on,' said Dick.

'No.' He snapped the answer with his mind now settled. 'I'll talk to 'em.'

'Robert, you----

But Robert was already striding truculently forward to where the speaker stood on the wall. He leaped up beside him, and he was in no mood for an argument. He seized the man by the shoulders, spun him round, and then helped the movement with his boot. The man went headlong into the wet mud, while a titter of amusement came from the crowd, and Robert straightened himself, watching them carefully while he let them all see him. There was a buzz of surprise, and then the weavers waited with interest. The man who had been thrown from the wall came pushing suddenly forward, trying to scramble up again, and it was his fellows at the front who stopped him.

'Thee shut up,' said one of them. 'Tha's had thi turn.'

Robert took his chance firmly. For an instant he envied the salted wit that would have come from Nicholas at such a moment, but he knew he was not Old Nick and could never hope to be. He must make do with what style he had, and he knew that the simplest would be the best.

'This fool——' he pointed to the man who was still being held back by his fellows. 'This fool's been telling you I'll be stuffing my pockets with bread I'll take from you. The man's mad. So is everyone who believes him. Now it's quite true that Mr. Hoyle and I are making ready a power-loom shop. You may as well know it, and if you've any sense you'll be thankful for it. We haven't taken bread from any man. We haven't stopped one single handloom, nor the work of one single weaver.'

'How about Thornber?' cried a voice, and at once there was a growl of applause from every side.

'I'm not concerned with Mr. Thornber. I'm answering for Mr. Hoyle and myself, and I'm telling you we have not put one single weaver out of work. We haven't any to put, and you all know it.'

Old Nick would have had them chuckling by now, and he thought this was dry stuff by comparison. But it was the best he could do, and he pressed doggedly on.

'If we offer work to a hundred men, are we taking work from you? There'll be safe and steady work for a hundred men who haven't work now. Doesn't that mean food and warmth for— 'He hurriedly remembered what Anna had said. 'Food and warmth for a hundred families? For a hundred wives and their children too? That's what we offer, and this man says we're taking something from you.'

He paused for breath, while he hastily arranged his thoughts, or Anna's thoughts.

'A good firm pays safe and steady, every Saturday, and if any man doesn't know what that means, he'd better go home and ask his wife. She'll tell him quick enough. Or else——'Another thought came suddenly to him, and he made quick use of it. 'You've a hundred spinners with you at just this moment, and they all have their pay from Mr. England. Try asking them what a good firm's like to work for.'

Again his breath ran out, but he saw that the weavers were looking thoughtful. He roused himself for one last effort.

'I know quite well that a lot of handloom men don't like power-looms. But a power-loom does more work than a handloom can. It makes more money, and you can have a share in that. A good man's worth more on a power-loom than on any handloom that was ever made. In quite a short time now we'll be posting up rates of pay, and if you can't see that they're better than handloom rates, just go home again and ask your wives. You'll find they've more sense than some men have. Or at least, they've more sense than this man has.'

His gesture to the man who had been on the wall was a contemptuous dismissal. Then his tone changed, and he spoke lightly.

'Now that's all. It's time you went for your dinners, those of you who can. I'm afraid a good many of you can't, and all I can say to you is, watch that door in Colne Lane. There'll be a notice soon about rates of pay, and one asking men to

apply. It will be good work, remember, and steady, and I wish you all good luck.'

He jumped down from the wall and stood for a moment recovering his breath after what had been a new exertion for him. Round him the crowd seemed to be in movement, and he thought they were beginning to disperse. Some were in talking groups, but others were pushing their way to the fringes and then hurrying off. He turned to Dick, and tried to speak easily.

'Let's go for dinner. It must be half past twelve.'

But it was easier said than done. As soon as they turned a half-dozen men pushed themselves in the way, and one of them seemed a spokesman. He asked when the notices would be up, and Robert was taken by surprise. There had been almost an appealing note in the voice.

'I can't exactly say,' he answered. 'It won't be long now.'
The man stood awkwardly, seeming not to know what to say, but it was not hard to make a guess. The others were close round him, and their haggard faces and tattered clothes gave hint enough. Robert was suddenly unhappy as he understood.

'You want work?' he said gently.

'Aye, we do.' He hesitated. 'If t'other men can't make their minds up----'

His voice faltered, but the meaning was pitifully clear. Robert's embarrassment grew sharper.

'I can't settle it now,' he said. 'We aren't ready.'

'Well, if we could leave our names with you?'

'Oh, I see.' He knew he would have to choose the best who offered, not the first, but he could not screw himself to a blunt refusal. 'You can leave your names at the factory this afternoon. I'll arrange for them to be taken. But I can't promise anything. I'll have to take the best men.'

He thought he had made his escape when he and Dick moved away, but again he was wrong. Another group was waiting to catch his eye, and then another, and each for the same purpose. They were given the same answers, and it was a quarter to one, and the dinner hour nearly over, before they were disposed of. Even Dick seemed a little put out.

'Poor devils!' was his comment. 'I'd not expected quite so much. You're going to have more men than you want.'

'More than the hundred?'

'Yes, when they've talked to their wives. That was a good touch of yours, by the way.'

'It was Anna's.'

'Well, you made good use of it. I think that list you promised them will fill up.'

'I must see about that, if it's to be ready for this afternoon. I need a word with Joe, too.'

But Joe was at dinner, and the word with him had to wait till evening when he appeared in the Hole i' th' Wall. He related with gusto his dealings with the crowd outside his factory, and his discomfiture of Jack Pickles. Then he was told of the events on the green, and he was soon chuckling with satisfaction.

'That's right,' he said happily. 'We're getting on a bit now, and we might start sooner than you think. Do you know we've had men coming in all afternoon to give their names? We've forty-two of 'em now, and a damned hollow-bellied lot they looked. More dinner-times than dinners, if you ask me. How many looms have we ready?'

'About thirty. Though we've not had the power yet for testing.'

'You can have it tomorrow, if you want it. That tenter of yours—what's his name?'

'Tattersall.'

'He's been messing about all day, and he's taken on a lad to shovel for him. What we're paying now in wages, I don't know.'

'Well, we can't start just yet, if that's what you mean.'

'I didn't say just yet. There's Lonsdale, you know, and Sam Sutcliffe. They might have a trick to play, so I don't think I'd go posting any notices just yet. And if we've any more men to put their names down, I'll lend 'em an awl.'

'What on earth for?'

'Punch another hole in their belts. But I've a notion it's Lonsdale's move next—him and Sutcliffe.'

Joe was right, as was very soon evident. At three o'clock the next afternoon the *Perseverance* coach from Manchester came slowly up the street in the clear cold sunlight of early March. Nicholas sat impatiently in it, cursing all horse-drawn coaches, and as soon as he was set down he knew that something was wrong. The town was strangely quiet. Groups of

men were standing at corners, and all had sticks in their hands. Other passers-by were few, and the shops seemed deserted. Most of them had the shutters up, and from one of the side streets a burst of shouting was heard, and the noise of hurrying clogs. Nicholas stood for a moment like a sniffing hound. Then he walked quickly down to St. Helen's mill, and as he entered Colne Lane he saw that the cobbles were littered with broken glass. A glance at Sutcliffe's putting-out room showed him the shattered windows, and some dents and scars on the door to hint at flying stones.

He marched into his counting-house and found Joe there, in talk with Dick and Robert.

'What's been the trouble?' he asked.

They were discussing exactly that, and they were able to give him the essential facts. It had begun quite early that morning. This was Friday; and the last of Tom Thornber's weavers, who had been dismissed the previous Friday, had gone to the putters-out this morning to hand in their woven cloth and draw their warp and weft for the next week. They had all been paid for their completed work at the agreed rate of a shilling the piece, but when the new work was handed out to them they had all been told that the rate in future would be ninepence, not a shilling.

The weavers had flared into fury at once. They had not expected this. A shilling a piece was low enough, and even Tom Thornber had always paid the fourteen pence that had been agreed two years ago. They had accepted the shilling because they had been grateful to the putters-out, but they had certainly supposed that the shilling was a rate well agreed. A reduction, moreover, to ninepence was vicious. Even in the darkest days the lowest rate had normally been tenpence, and only exceptionally had anybody offered less. To make things worse, it appeared that ninepence was now to be the rate for all the weavers, and not only for those who had left Tom Thornber.

They slammed the warp and weft back on the counters and demanded explanations, and from all the employers they had the same answer: wages for a hundred and fifty extra men had now to be found each week; the extra cloth could not be sold unless its price was reduced; the employers were unable to

bear this loss themselves, and it must therefore be spread over everybody by reducing the rate.

'And that might be true,' said Joe. 'Sagar was right about it, if you ask me. They haven't the money, most of 'em.'

Joe went on with the tale. The infuriated weavers had rushed into the streets again, meeting their fellows from other employers and hearing the same tale from each. Then they had gone storming down into Waterside, calling the news to the hundreds who were at work on their looms in the cottages and tenements. They had all come swarming out, and it did not take long for somebody to do the arithmetic. It may not have been done very accurately, but it was enough to show that a reduction of threepence the piece, applied to everybody, would far exceed the loss in selling a little extra cloth at a shade below the usual price. The employers, in short, were taking advantage. Their trade might be falling off, but they meant to raise their profits to the limit while it lasted.

It roused the weavers to a fury, perhaps not lessened by a sickening fear that in the end they would have to take it. It was a choice between ninepence and the workhouse, and either meant despair. They went raging back to the putting-out rooms to demand some fairer treatment, and at each place they found the door was shut and bolted. Employers parleyed from upper windows, and all stuck firmly to it that those were the terms. If any weaver objected, they said, there were plenty who would be glad of anything. It was at this point that stones began to fly, but the magistrate, William Wood, had been quickly out, and the weavers had shown enough respect for him to listen when he tried to address them. He had said he would intercede with the employers on their behalf and see what could be arranged, and the weavers had seized gratefully on this. They had even given him a cheer, and for the rest of the day the peace had been more or less kept. But what would happen tomorrow was anybody's guess; and in the meantime. said Joe, the list of names at his door had grown to a hundred and twenty.

'What's that?' said Nicholas sharply.

It was a reminder that he did not know of yesterday's events, and he had to be told at once. He listened impassively, and he turned to stare out of the window, his forehead puckering with thought. Then, with no haste, he turned to Robert.

'It seems your moment,' he said quietly.

'For what?'

'Anything you please. And for pity's sake don't waste it.' He almost snapped it now. 'You've Lonsdale and his friends with their names stinking. You've Thornber out of it while he builds his shed. You've every Jack Weaver in the place looking at you for help. So what are you doing?'

'I said I'd be ready in a month, and I've had ten days. I can't

do miracles.'

'When does the list of wages go up?'

'It could go up any time.'

'Post it tomorrow.'

'I can't give a date yet for---'

'Post it tomorrow. Next week you can start choosing your men.' The full force of the man was suddenly in the voice and the shining eyes. 'If there was ever a moment, this is it, and you can't expect that there'll be another. For pity's sake, get moving.'

33

SHAW & HOYLE

ROBERT sat late that night preparing his rates of pay. He had meant to go to Greenfield, but one of John's corn men had arrived with a note from Anna. It merely said that Susan's time was very near, which semed a fairly good hint that male visitors would not be wanted at Greenfield for the next day or two. But Anna had also put a postscript: 'Has the mistake been made yet? I don't mean yours.'

He knew it had, and as Anna had foretold. The mistake had been made from which there might be no recovery, and it had

been the other men's mistake. They had dropped their rates of pay too brutally, and the weavers' anger made a chance for Shaw & Hoyle. Nicholas had been right, and this was a time for haste.

His disappointment at not seeing Anna faded as he came to grips with his work. A handloom man, if he and his family pushed it to the limit, might do six pieces in a week, and at the old rate of fourteen pence could earn seven shillings. The power-looms would weave pieces of a hundred yards, much longer than those from the handlooms, and he could expect at least a piece a week from each loom. He hoped that it would be a piece and a half when the men grew used to the looms, and it might even be possible, some day, to let a man tent three looms instead of two. But for the moment it must be two looms and an output of perhaps a piece and a quarter from each of them. He drew up his rates of pay on that assumption.

Then he turned, with a growing excitement, to the question of the starting date. Thirty looms were ready now. Harry Hartley was to start as tackler on Monday, and he was to bring an assistant with him. With two tacklers at work, there might be sixty looms ready by the end of the week. It might be a hundred after another week, which would perhaps be enough to allow a start, and a surge of excitement set his hand shaking as he reached for the calendar. Two weeks from Monday would be March the 18th, and that, he decided, should be the fateful day. Shaw & Hoyle should be a running firm that day.

He sat staring at the calendar, unable to take his eyes from it as he tried to grasp the meaning of the date he had ringed with ink. He tried to remember, in one sweep of vision, the years of hoping and the months of planning that should come to reality in that great day, and he could not. He was too tired, and even excitement eluded him now. The thing was there, but he could not take it in. His mind was dulled; and it would be better to give thanks to God, and then go to bed.

He had his notices on the factory door by seven o'clock next morning. Then he went for a word with Tom Ogden, who promptly reminded him that if they were to set up a hundred looms they would need a hundred warps, to say nothing of the weft, and when was the yarn coming? Almost at once, said Robert with an expressionless face; and he went to talk to Nicholas.

He was back in the factory before noon, and Joe had a grin on his face. There had been a crowd of weavers in the lane all morning, peering at the notices and asking what they were about; and as not many of them could read, Joe had had to keep a man outside to repeat what the notices said. The names on the list were now two hundred and thirty, and he began to wonder if there would be any need to post a general notice inviting weavers to apply. After a little thought he decided to leave that point till Monday. He would see how many names were then on the list.

But what came on Monday took him wholly by surprise, and he was not alone in that. Nicholas went off to Manchester again that Monday morning, for another meeting. He was away in the Perseverance at six o'clock, and at seven o'clock Robert was at St. Helen's mill, helping Dick to make sure that Monday morning began as it should. At eight o'clock he was at Joe's factory, making sure that the tacklers, the loomers, and the reachers-in were all at work. At nine o'clock he was back in the counting-house, reading a hurried note that Ellen had sent down from Cumberland House. She had just had word from Anna, at Greenfield, that a son had been born to Susan on Sunday afternoon; and Robert had to turn from his work to write a note to John. At ten o'clock another handwritten note was brought to him. It was from Harry Bolton, and it was brief. The magistrates were now at Bolton's office for their usual Monday discussion; and they asked the immediate attendance of Mr. Shaw, whether convenient or not.

There was no hint of a reason, but such a request could hardly be refused. There was a cold shiver in his stomach as he wondered if they would press him not to risk the peace of the town by opening a power-loom shop just now, and he was already thinking of a possible answer as he reached for his hat and coat. He knew they could not compel him, but they could make it very hard for him if they pressed it for the public safety.

In Colne Lane a group of men were waiting to intercept him with questions, and he was tight-lipped about it as he answered that he could tell them nothing at the moment. Then, in Market Street, he found a different scene. The place was thronged with men, some hundreds of them, standing about with sullen faces and angry voices. He had to use his elbows to make a way through, and the nearer he came to Bolton's office the denser the throng became, until it dawned upon him that all these men were intent on the office too. He put a question to the nearest man, and the surly answer removed all doubt. William Wood had promised to talk to their employers for them, asking that the reduction in pay should be cancelled. They had not yet heard the answer, and now they were waiting for it.

He pushed his way to the office, and the clerks took him quickly to the inner room, which was warm and cosy, with a bright fire burning and a gleam of polished brass from the inkpot. Bolton was at the desk, Foulds had a chair by the end of it, and Wood was standing in front of the fire, with his hands behind his back, flipping his coat-tails up and down as he warmed his trousers.

Bolton waved him to a chair, but it was Wood, still erect on the hearthrug, who had charge of this. He stood in silence for a moment, and then he came to it in short words. He asked if it were true that Shaw & Hoyle would open in two weeks' time, and the tight unhappiness came back to Robert as he answered that it was. Wood seemed to give ear to a shouting in the street outside. Then he brought his attention back, and his voice was firm and quiet.

'I need hardly tell you that the town is in a difficult state just now. You know what those men are shouting for?'

'This reduction in their pay---'

'Threepence in the piece.' There was cold disapproval in his voice. 'I've been talking to their employers about it through the weekend, asking them to continue what used to be paid, and I've failed. They'll restore a part of it, they say, and they expect to be called generous in consequence. The most I can have is a rate of ten and a half pence.'

'Half the reduction.'

'Yes. Bolton's done the arithmetic. The employers will save on this reduction something like four times what they can lose on that extra cloth.'

'I can believe it.'

'Thank you.' He glanced again at the window, seeming now to draw deliberate attention to the sounds outside. 'Do you see what I am coming to?'

It did not seem difficult to guess. Robert sat very still, while

his thoughts ran hurriedly over the reasons he had put together for beginning his looms in spite of this. They seemed less convincing now than when he had first thought of them.

'When do you intend to begin?' said the quiet voice.

'This day two weeks.'

'Is it possible to alter that?'

'It would be difficult. It would cause a heavy loss to us, and I don't think it's really necessary.'

'Difficult, I'll believe. Necessary is a matter of opinion.'

"Yes, but---"

'How many looms would you open with?'

'Perhaps a hundred.'

'In two weeks? Couldn't you manage half a hundred this week?'

'This--'

Robert moved suddenly in his chair, and he had to turn his thoughts right over to adjust to this. It was about opening sooner, not later, and he seemed, for the moment, to have everything upside down.

'Shaw—' Wood's firm voice broke in before he had fully grasped it. 'I don't like interfering in any man's business, but I must speak my mind about this. If there is one thing that has kept the peace this last winter, I believe it to be the Gas Company, with all that digging and building. Wages mean food, and food, in the end of things, means quiet. It isn't quiet now.'

Again he turned his head, and again the noise from the street seemed to flood through the room. Then he went on, slowly and steadily.

The Company has finished. Apart from a few men at the works it will pay no more wages. That happened as the bad weather came, and now these weaving masters have chosen to bring this on us. Do you wonder there's trouble?'

'No.'

'Nor need anyone.' The tone changed suddenly as he came to business. 'I asked Thornber to come here this morning too, but it seems he's still in Manchester. I've asked Sagar and Holroyd to come in later, and I'm going to ask them to press ahead with their looms and offer work as soon as they can. But it's you, and only you, who can do it now. Thornber will be some weeks yet.'

'He's building his shed.

'But he hasn't finished it, and I need something now. I mean this morning, Shaw.' Again there was that jerk of his head to the window. 'In a few minutes' time I must tell those fellows that it's three halfpence a piece less, and I want some good news at the same time. I want to say that there's somebody offering them work this week—taking on hands tomorrow. That might just save everything. Will you do it?'

He ended abruptly, and a silence gripped the room. A chair creaked as Bolton leaned forward, and Robert's thoughts were in the loomshop where the tacklers had begun their work this morning. And young Jack was new as a loomer, and ought not to be hurried.

'How many looms are ready?'

Wood's voice broke in again, firm but not impatient, and Robert lifted his head to answer.

'Thirty.'

'In three days' time, how many?'

'Perhaps fifty.'

'Will you open with fifty? On Thursday?'

'But----'

'It's important, Shaw.'

'Fifty looms is only twenty-five men.'

'But it would be something definite. Not a hope in the future, but something now, and they might even believe that it would get bigger. Will you do it?'

'Yes.'

He spoke quickly. Now that it had come he answered confidently, and already his mind was ranging beyond the room and he was telling Joe of this, and then Anna. This was a duty, not a choice, and it was exhilarating. He felt his breath come powerfully, and suddenly he came to his feet, ready to begin.

'Not just yet.' Wood was holding up a protesting hand. 'There's something else to speak of before you go. But, Foulds, don't you think we ought to tell these fellows at once? That noise of theirs is changing.'

'They're impatient. Don't blame them, either.' Foulds spoke for the first time as he heaved himself to his feet. 'Let's tell 'em, then.'

'Right.' Wood took a pace towards the door. 'No, we shan't

need you, Bolton. You can save us time by telling Shaw of the other matter.

'If you wish.' Harry Bolton had come round his desk, and he seemed to speak with disapproval. 'I don't like you to go out unescorted.'

'They aren't dangerous yet. So tell Shaw what we have in mind.'

The two magistrates went out, and Bolton moved slowly back to his desk.

'It's not right,' he said stiffly. 'Justices should not have to go out alone to address weavers. They should have a file or two of soldiers with them.'

'Since there aren't any soldiers nearer than Burnley---'

'It's scandalous.' Bolton gave a well practised snort of indignation. 'There should be a garrison in the town. It's a point of view we're pressing on the Home Office, I assure you.'

He sounded important about it, and not displeased when he saw Robert's look of surprise. He settled himself a little more comfortably in his chair.

'The Home Office,' he repeated. 'In these days I keep the Secretary of State informed of our affairs. Lord John Russell, of course.'

Robert's surprise grew deeper. Secretaries of State were exalted persons, remote in London, and he would have been surprised to learn that Lord John Russell had ever heard of Colne. The notion of Harry Bolton in correspondence with him was new indeed.

'You mean you write letters to him?' he asked.

'Through his officials, of course.' The dry cough still sounded important. 'Now I am speaking in strict confidence, and I must take your memory back some four weeks. I believe you were with Mr. England when he saw a party of men walk out of Windy Bank? He thought they had been doing pike drill in a dandy shop——'

'Halstead's.'

'Exactly. And the Justices required that the matter be kept secret.' For a moment Bolton's head went back again as some noise of shouting came from the street. But it died away, and he gave a satisfied nod before he continued. 'It was kept secret to give us a better chance to obtain evidence. In spite of that, we have failed. We can find no evidence at all.'

'I'm not surprised.'

'Nor am I. There must be scores of folk who know perfectly well what is going on, and there's not one of them dare say a word. The truth is that they're frightened.'

'Nothing more likely. But I don't see where this is leading.'

'You would, if you had the duty of informing Home Secretary. His questions on this have been urgent.'

'On this?'

Robert spoke incredulously. The notion of a Secretary of State interested in a group of weavers walking out of Windy Bank was almost too much for him. But Bolton looked grimly earnest.

'The Secretary is watching the North very carefully. All the Justices are sending reports, and the government knows exactly what is going on.' The papers rustled on his desk as he sought the one he wanted. 'There's a letter here from the Home Office about this drilling. They evidently understand our difficulties, and they point out——'

A sound of cheering came from the street, and Bolton stopped abruptly. For a moment he listened, and then he gave a nod of satisfaction again.

'I expect he's told them what you've promised,' he said. 'A very wise decision, if I may say so.'

'Thank you. But this letter?'

'Ah, yes. They point out that evidence can best be procured by a man who is a stranger here, and can give his testimony without fears of consequences. A very sound suggestion.'

'But what has it to do with me?'

'I keep trying to tell you. What they suggest is that they send to us a police officer from the Force in London. They suggest a Sergeant Harris, and they say he can be sent immediately.'

The door opened, and Wood and Foulds came quickly in. Bolton's lifted head asked the question, and Wood gave him a terse answer as he went back to the fire.

'All right so far,' he said. 'But I was glad to tell them about the new work. Thanks for your promise, Shaw. Now has Bolton told you about this policeman?'

'Yes. I've been asking what it has to do with me?'

. 'It's pretty obvious.' Wood flipped his coat-tails up again and planted his feet apart on the hearth-rug. 'This man Harris

can't come here as a policeman, and he won't look right as an idler. So we'll have to find him a job. You're the one man in the town who's offering jobs, and we want you to offer Harris one.'

'Oh, I see. But what can we say he is? I don't suppose he knows a loomer's work.'

'Have you a doorkeeper yet?'

'Well, no.'

'He should be all right as that. A policeman ought to be an excellent doorkeeper. It'll only be for a few weeks, of course.'

'Very well.'

There was nothing else to be said. It seemed a plain duty now to support the Justices, and he had just had a glimpse of what these men were doing, and what they were faced with, without pay or thanks from anyone. It had been revealing, and he had a new feeling of respect for William Wood.

'Now,' he said, 'I'd better go. How I'm to be ready for

Thursday I don't know, and I mustn't waste time.'

He stepped quickly into the street, and in Colne Lane he had to give up all attempt at haste. It was packed and jammed with men, noisy and jostling, and it was clear, as he came down the lane, that their feelings were divided. There was a ragged cheer from a part of the crowd, and questions were hurled at him about when hands would be taken on. But there were also some growls of anger and shouted threats, and once he saw a group of hard-faced men pushing ominously towards him, only to be stopped and swept away by the swirl of the crowd. It was a difficult passage for him, and once again he wished he had the easy flow of talk that seemed to come so naturally to Nicholas. But he pushed firmly forward, and it was easier than he had expected. He won to the door, and then he turned for a word with them. A stone came hurtling as he did so, smashing against the wall above his head, and he could see a sway and surge at the back of the crowd, where someone seemed to be fighting the man who had thrown it. He put his back firmly against the door and lifted his hand, and at once, to his surprise, the uproar died away as he told them briefly that hands would be taken on tomorrow, beginning at eight o'clock, and that first choices would be from those who had put their names on the list. He added that more would be taken on next week, and more still, he hoped, the week after; always provided that no damage was done to the factory. Then he felt the door behind him open, and he was pulled firmly in.

'What the heck?' asked Joe.

'Come to the office.'

They were ready, somehow and in some fashion, for the start on Thursday, and perhaps only the tacklers knew how much was wrong. Twenty-five weavers were engaged on Tuesday, and three hundred names on the list allowed a careful choice. The tacklers and the loomers worked themselves to exhaustion on the upper floor, and Joe's ironworkers were borrowed to connect the looms to the shafts. Then, on the Tuesday morning, a noise that had not been heard for years came reverberating through the factory. Outside, in the chill March wind, white puffs of steam were rising as a signal to all the town. Inside there was a clanking and groaning as the long disused shafting began to turn, with Joe's men crawling everywhere to pour oil into the rusty straps that held it. Robert was here there and everywhere, trying to oversee all at once, turning from deliveries of yarn to problems about the spacing of looms. The only man with not enough to do was Joe, and that was because he lacked the knowledge. So he found himself another task. He said there must be a party to celebrate the opening, and Robert heard him without much interest. He was too busy for that sort of thing, and he left Joe to it.

Nicholas came back on the Tuesday afternoon with Tom Thornber, and at Cumberland House Ellen met him with the news that Shaw & Hoyle had gone mad. Half an hour later he walked down Colne Lane to find things out for himself, and his first move was to pull Robert into the deserted office and tell him to take it easy.

'If you're going to run this business,' he said, 'you'll have to run yourself as well, and that means thinking how you look. If your men are any good, leave 'em to it. It isn't the noisy hen that lays all the eggs.'

'I don't call it fussing if I want to see-

'It's what your men call it that matters. Try not to look so worried when you walk round the place, and if you've nothing to walk round for, don't walk at all. Stay in your office. How's Joe?'

'He's talking about a party, and that's all he can think of.'

'Tell him I'll come. How's Sam Sutcliffe?'

'I've no notion.'

'Don't you think you ought to have?' With all this going on next door, he might be thinking of something. I'd keep an eye

on Sam, if I were you.'

But Robert was too busy to think about Sam Sutcliffe, and it was all he could do to heed the advice that Nicholas had seemed to speak so casually. Advice from Nicholas, as he now well knew, was usually dropped like that, but was none the less worth heeding. So he did his best, next day, not to walk from one room to another for no better reason than to see how the work was going; and in the end, to keep himself quiet, he pulled his coat off, rolled up his sleeves, and began to assemble a waiting loom from its packed components. The tacklers looked surprised; but his repeated attempts at weaving had taught him the details, and when they came to test that loom they found it right. In later days he was to learn that this had done more to establish him than any amount of supervision would have done.

There were no more visitors. He saw very little of Joe and nothing at all of Nicholas. He did not even see Anna. It was eleven o'clock when he finished on the Wednesday night, utterly tired, but satisfied that they were as ready as they could be for weavers in the morning. He walked home alone through the dark and sleeping town, and when he let himself into his lodging he found that Anna had not forgotten him. A note lay on the table, and in his haste to open it he all but blew the candle out. By its quavering light he read the clear firm

writing:

My dear Robert:

I have heard all about it from Nick, who came specially here to tell me, and I well understand that you yourself couldn't. You have been much too busy, and that is why I have not come to see you. It is work first, now. But I can't let you start your looms without wishing you Godspeed and all the fortune that you deserve; which, I may tell you, is a lot. May it be with you for many many years! However long it may last, and however far it may take you, I think you will remember this first day always. So, I promise you, will

He had that in his pocket as he went down Colne Lane at half past six next morning. He meant to be there in good time, to see it all, this first great day, though he knew he would not be the earliest. Already there was black smoke pouring from the chimney as the new young stoker flung in the coals under the anxious eye of Jack o' Dick's, the tenter. Joe was standing by the door, though none of his ironworkers was expected vet. and from the upper floor came sounds of heavy feet as the tacklers and the loomers took a last look round and exchanged quick words on how to deal with weavers. Joe had a cheerful greeting for his partner, and then the two of them walked round together, quite uselessly, since there was now no more for them to do. At ten minutes to seven Joe looked at his watch, and then called to Harry Hartley and Tom Ogden to come downstairs with him. He shouted for Jack o' Dick's as well, whose name he remembered was Tattersall. He took them to the office, with Robert and himself, the two partners and the three chief men of the infant firm, and from a keg that had appeared from nowhere he drew five mugs of beer. He handed them round.

'We've just time to wet it before we start,' he said. 'And long may it last!'

'Aye,' said Tom.

'You know how we say it.' Joe looked round as the mugs rose ready. 'To thee and me and all of us! May we never want nowt, none of us!'

The response was drowned in a clatter of clogs as the first of the weavers came. The mugs, wet and dripping, were hastily slammed on the table, and two minutes later the whistle on the chimney fizzed and spluttered, and then broke into a howl to match the one that was coming from St. Helen's mill below. Jack o' Dick's gave the steam to the engine in working earnest, the flywheel began to turn, the shafting creaked and rumbled, and from the upper floor came a new and startling noise, the high devil's clatter of the tireless looms.

Thus, at long last, they began.

GLAD THE HEART OF MAN

ROBERT SPENCER was a cooper in Market Street. He was an earnest and hard working man, only recently launched in his business and trying hard to build it up. He made and mended casks of every kind, and there was a yard behind his house, conveniently approached by an alley, in which he could store his casks and stocks of timber. The staple of his trade was with the wine merchants and the taverns, but he would deal on humbler levels too. Casks that were too soured for wines and beers could still be put to use for lamp oil, or vinegar, or even pickled herrings, and he won a useful profit from dealing in these reconditioned casks. Somebody was always wanting the five-gallon kegs, which were convenient for household use.

Spencer, of course, knew perfectly well that Shaw & Hoyle had begun their work that Thursday morning, but it would hardly affect the demand for casks. He was much more interested in an incident that came a little after six o'clock that evening. He had finished his day's work, and was quietly having his tea, when a knock came on the outer door. His wife went to see what it was, and came back to say there was a man wanting second-hand kegs. Spencer looked pleased. Tea or no tea, it was not his habit to turn away trade that came, so he pushed back his chair and went to the door himself.

The man was a stranger, but he looked and spoke as if he came from Waterside. He did not seem a man who would have either a need for kegs or the means to pay for them, and Spencer was alert to the point at once. He would want to see this man's money before he parted with his kegs. But it was not yet the moment to mention that, and he briefly asked what was wanted. He was answered as promptly. The man wanted ten five-gallon kegs, all to be water-tight; looks did not matter, but they must be decently sweet inside; and he would pay up to two shillings each for them.

Spencer's surprise grew. This was a high price for secondhand kegs, and he did not see what they were wanted for. He hastily considered his stock, decided that he could find what was wanted, and said firmly that his price would be two shillings each. Then he put a candle in a lantern, led the way to the yard and sorted out the kegs. The man looked them over, sniffed at them, and said they would do. Then he offered fifteen shillings for the lot. Spencer demanded the promised twenty, and they fell to haggling. In two minutes they had come to terms at eighteen shillings, and Spencer was about to mention a sight of money when the man cut him short. He said he would pay half of it now, and the rest when he came to collect the kegs tomorrow. Then he fished in his pocket, and in the lantern-light he counted out the money.

Spencer took it. He said that the kegs would be ready tomorrow, and the man answered that he would come at the same hour again, with a handcart. He added a brief good night, and then went striding into the darkness of the alley. Spencer locked the yard and went back to his tea, but the incident had roused his curiosity. He was not quite sure that it was what it seemed to be, and he thought he would like to know a little more about this man and the use he had for kegs. A notion of how to do it had already occurred to him.

During these same minutes, when Spencer had been selling his kegs, a small stream of people had begun to move down Colne Lane for Joe's inaugural party. They had been bidden for half past six, so that they could see the last few minutes of the working day, and perhaps be shown some samples of the firm's first cloth. Then they would come to business, which meant the eating and drinking, with a speech or two thrown in. Joe had already been home for a change of clothes, and now he looked very clean and shining as he stood by the open door. lighted by the flaring gas, to receive his guests, Robert, who had given this no thought at all until he was almost pulled downstairs by Joe, was still in his working clothes. There was no time now to go for a change, and he could do no more than wash as best he could, smooth his hair, and hope for the best. He was standing at Joe's side as the guests came in, but he had never even asked who they might be. But Joe's good sense had told him from the beginning that if he wanted this done properly he had better consult his wife; and Jane, as soon as she was brought into it, had remembered all the people Joe would have forgotten. Robert was therefore taken wholly by surprise when his mother came in with Jane and Mary Ann. and it took an angry glare from Jane to bring his wits to work again. He saw the glare turn to something like amusement as

he did his best to pretend that he had been expecting them, and as they passed up the stair he thought there was a sly grin on Joe. But there was no chance to ask about it. William Wood arrived just then with Harry Bolton, and they had to be formally welcomed. Then Nicholas came, with Ellen and Tom and Susie, and the sight of them sent Robert suddenly into panic as he remembered that he had not even invited Anna. He was just wheeling on Joe with the urgent question when Tom Thornber came rolling in, with a fine jovial look of one-cotton-master-toanother on his big round face. Hard after him came Dick Sagar and his wife; and then, at last, and before Robert had even managed that word with Joe, John Phillips came quietly through the door, with Anna's arm linked in his. Robert was with them on the instant, and he had just time to see the radiance in Anna's face before he heard Joe stepping after him. He hastened to get his word in first.

'I'm so glad,' he said quickly. 'I didn't know whether you'd

be coming, and---'

'Of course we've come. We've come to congratulate you—both of you.'

She had tactfully included Joe in that, and at once he was beaming at her while he attempted a modest cough.

'Well, we do our best, and I always say you can't do more. Now you'd like to leave your cape, wouldn't you? Come along to my office.'

Joe was exuding good will as he led her away. John followed with an amused smile, and Robert was left to do the best he could with Holroyd, who surged through the doorway looking as if he had had a drink already and wouldn't mind another. He went pounding up the stair, and then it was seven o'clock. The engine-tenter cut the steam away at last. The puffing of the engine faded, the rumble of the shafting stopped, and the din of the looms gave way to a healing silence, broken only by a hiss of escaping steam from somewhere above the roof. The weavers looked sheepish under the gaze of so many eyes, but there was a wave of the hand from Joe to send them clattering down the stair to join his ironworkers, who were waiting thirstily. There was beer for them all, and a great stack of beefand-kidney pies, far more than one for each of them; and this, as it later appeared, had been Jane's insistence. No one told the weavers what to do; but ten minutes later, when they had finished the beer and gone, there was not a pie in sight. They

were clutched under the weavers' coats, for wives and children; and Tom Ogden said later that not a single ironworker had even nibbled at a pie.

Up above, by the silent looms, the sausages were eaten, with the cakes and the sugared fruits. The port and brandy were drunk, and the cups of tea left unwanted. Joe made a speech of loud good will, and Robert a quieter one. Nicholas replied for the guests, and William Wood, perhaps feeling like something was expected of him, added the brief thanks of the Justices for the speedy opening of the firm. Then he made a suggestion.

'In these days,' he said carefully, 'with Chartists everywhere, and something disloyal being shouted at every corner, I think a firm like yours might take an address that has a flourish of loyalty in it. In some towns there have been factories that have taken the name of the Queen—Victoria works. That sort of thing.'

'Victoria?' Joe seemed to be trying the sound of it as he spoke. 'Not bad, is it? Right. We'll have it on our paper.'

But habits of speech die hard. For many a year the corn men had changed their mills to cotton, but no one had changed the word, and no one thought to change it now. There was not a millstone in the factory, but Victoria mill it was. Joe had it printed so on the letterhead, and it seemed as natural to all of them as it did to him.

Then came Monday, and it was a day that Robert was never to forget. Friday and Saturday were useful days in which it seemed that they were learning how to work with the looms and with one another, and by Monday morning the cloth was almost of market standard. Perhaps in another hour or two it would be fit for Dick to sell in Manchester, and Robert made himself go firmly away from the looms, lest he distract or upset the men. But at half past nine a handwritten note came down from Harry Bolton, as it had done the previous Monday, and once again he asked Robert to go up for a word with William Wood. But this time Bolton was able to say briefly what the matter was. Sergeant Harris, the London police officer, had now arrived in Colne and was willing to be passed off as doorkeeper to Shaw & Hoyle; and Robert was asked to discuss the details.

Again it was hardly to be refused. It was even welcome in its way, since a good doorkeeper could do a lot towards general discipline, and they had already felt the difficulty of being

without one. So Robert went to Bolton's office, and he took Joe with him. They walked up together, Joe listening with satisfaction as Robert told him what excellent cloth was coming

from the looms this morning.

Sergeant Harris turned out to be uncommonly like Joe, a big wide-chested man, perhaps in his early thirties, who looked as if he could be very friendly and genial when he wished, and something quite different when he did not. At the moment he was quiet and attentive, listening carefully to Wood's account of affairs, and seeming to store it away in his memory without much effort. He asked a question or two about his duties and conduct as a doorkeeper, and then seemed satisfied; and when Robert asked how he would account for his coming to Colne, he had the answer pat. He had been chosen for the work, he said, because he had been a Manchester man before going to London, and now he would be one again. He would find lodgings during the day and be at Victoria mill by seven o'clock tomorrow. He would use, he said, his own name of Harris.

Joe looked pleased as he and Robert emerged into the street again. He was pleased about Harris, and he was pleased about the progress the weavers were making. The Red Lion was con-

veniently handy, and he led at once to its door.

'There's time for a pint,' he said, 'before we go down there again.'

'I think we ought to see how---'

'Don't get fussed. They can chuck those shuttles for another

two minutes without you.'

They went in together, and the two minutes had stretched to twelve before Joe had settled his second pint. Then they walked briskly along Market Street and turned into Colne Lane; and at one glance they knew that there was something wrong. Half a dozen men from the mill were out in the street, and two of them were bawling noisily. One lay on the cobbles, flat on his back, and the others, with mugs in their hands, were upending a small dark barrel from which beer seemed to be flowing anywhere but into their mugs. From inside the mill a wild bawling of voices could be heard, a stamping of feet, and what was perhaps an attempt at song.

'Hell!' said Joe. 'They're drunk!'

The likeness of a great cat was suddenly with him again, and he went down the lane at a run, quick-footed and dangerous. He dealt out kicks in passing, and the men with the barrel went down in a blaspheming heap. A man bawling in the doorway crumpled like a wet sack as Joe drove a fist into his stomach. Another, lurching out at that moment, was spun round and sent sprawling by another kick. Joe went plunging through the door with Robert at his heels.

Inside was pandemonium, a roaring of drunken voices, some shouting, some quarrelling, and some in a corner trying to sing in chorus. Beer seemed to be everywhere. The place reeked of it, pools of it lay on the floor, men were splashed with it, and kegs seemed to be on every bench, wet and dripping. For an instant Joe halted, and Robert checked behind him, appalled at the sight and sound of it. He saw Joe's head go back, as if he were listening to sounds from above, and then the crash and splinter of breaking wood could be heard through the stamp of feet on the ceiling. It surely meant looms, and Robert was almost in front of Joe as they leaped for the stair together.

A chaos of drunken weavers seemed to fill the upper floor, and again the beer seemed everywhere, kegs of it lying about, and pools of it splashed on the clean new cloth from the looms. The weavers were shouting and bawling, and if most of them were aimless, one or two were not. One had an axe, and another a hammer, and they were battering savagely at the hated power-looms, while others cheered them on. Harry Hartley, looking as if he had been fighting with someone, was sitting on the floor, white and dazed, with a trickle of blood coming from his mouth; and Tom Ogden, looking by no means at his best, was standing in front of him, apparently to hold off some angry weavers. Young Jack looked as drunk as anybody, and the second tackler had disappeared.

Once again Joe took the lead, and with his temper roused he might almost have been Tom Thornber. He dealt first with the two who were savaging the looms. The axe was twitched from the man's hand and sent hurtling to the floor. Then he was spun round and hustled across the room, and a great full-weight kick sent him headlong down the stair. In a few more seconds the man with the hammer went hurtling after him. Joe came back and looked for the noisiest weaver. He found him in mid-floor, a fellow mouthing obscenities, and Joe used his fist as Tom had done in the Hole i' th' Wall. The man had no chance at all, and with his balance fuddled by the beer he

went crashing down. A moment later Joe slung him through the door.

That was the end of trouble. No one else had any stomach for it, and most of them had been harmless all the time, in spite of the noise they had made. Joe's ruthless demonstration had perhaps sobered them, and when Robert raised his voice in a series of angry orders they made no trouble. The icy crackle that had come into his tone seemed frightening to them, and one by one they began shambling to the door, lurching and stumbling as they tried to walk, and suddenly one of them was clutching his stomach as he vomited a stream of beer and porridge on the floor. Joe's boot sent him reeling, and Robert turned icily to Tom Ogden, who was still in front of Hartley.

'Get a bucket of water,' he snapped. 'Swab his head, and your own as well. Then I'll see you both in the office.'

He walked out without another word, hurrying down the stair after Joe, and suddenly the reek of burning was in his nose. His hurry became a run, and at the foot of the stair he saw the drift of smoke. Joe had seen it too, and he was using fist and boot to sweep away the last of the staggering men who blocked the stair. He burst past them, with Robert close behind him, and they were perhaps only just in time as they charged together into the big ironworking room. It had been somebody's drunken frolic to work the bellows of the forge in these last few minutes, and the great pan of charcoal was bright and flickering. Three wooden stools, soaked with the oil of years, had been flung on top, and the flames were flaring and crackling to the beams of the ceiling. The tipsy ironworkers were standing round it in a cheering ring when Joe came through like a battering ram. He snatched the tongs from the anvil, and with one fierce sweep he tumbled the blazing wood to the floor. It flared the more wildly for that, and little tongues of smoke began to creep up from the oily boards, but it was less dangerous than on the flickering charcoal. Joe snatched the leg of a stool, blackened and hot from the fire, and put it to use as a club on any man he could reach. Robert turned to the two firebuckets, and sent the water sluicing over the pile of blazing wreckage. He used his heel to stamp out what still smouldered. and by the time he had finished he was aware of an almost forgotten silence round him. The last of the men had been hustled from the building, and Joe had slammed the door on

them. He locked it, and he was breathing noisily as he came back.

'Nice for a Monday morning,' was his comment. 'What the hell were they drinking?'

'Beer, of course.'

'Smells a bit more than that.' Joe went sniffing carefully at an upturned cask on the floor. 'It's beer laced with gin, and I don't wonder it made 'em mad.'

'But how did they get it?'

'We can guess who it was.'

'Can we do anything?'

'Not unless we can prove it.'

'I was thinking of that man Harris. He's supposed to be here to find evidence.'

'If he'd been here a day sooner, this wouldn't have happened. With a doorkeeper, the stuff couldn't have come in. Let's see

what the damage is.'

They went upstairs together, and of fifty-six looms that had been working, there was damage to twenty-five. Not all of it was serious, and perhaps only three were beyond repair; but, between that and the cut and tangled threads that were hanging in confusion everywhere, there would certainly be some hard work needed from the tacklers and the loomers before all was well again. Robert looked round it bitterly.

'If we'd only been ten minutes sooner,' he said.

'Well, I don't know.' Joe spoke slowly now, and thoughtfully. 'If we'd come back a bit sooner, we might have found 'em in the fighting stage. As it was, they were no trouble at all.'

'But what's happened?'

'Someone gave 'em this stuff.' Joe rubbed his foot on one of the forgotten casks. 'Done when we were out, of course. That's about ten of these things I've seen. About five gallons each, and gin in it too. But I'd like to know where it came from.'

'If we can find that out, I shall go and see Bolton again. It's

a matter for the magistrates.'

'Well, we haven't found it out yet. Isn't it time you set those tacklers working?'

'Are we to take them back, after drinking at work?'

'Now don't expect too much of men. If you turn this lot off and have a new crowd, they won't be any better. Anyway, we haven't the time to look for 'em now. You know we haven't.'

Robert knew it only too well. He thought that at best it

would be three full days before the damage to the looms could be mended, and it was certainly not a moment to be looking for new men. They would have to make the best of it. He had Ogden and Hartley at work again within half an hour, and by early afternoon a half-dozen of the weavers had been hauled in from the street and set to swill the floors and begin a tidying-up. They were white and sickly, and they did scarcely two men's work between the six, but it was at least a beginning; and, as Robert noted with pleasure, they even showed something of gratitude at being allowed to return at all. He himself worked steadily with the tacklers, and in their present state he was as good as they were.

He had intended to work late with them that night, but a little before seven o'clock, when Joe had come upstairs to ask how things were going, a message was brought up that Robert Spencer, the cooper, was at the mill, and they looked at each other in surprise. Neither of them had any notion of what he

might want.

Spencer, in fact, had heard during the afternoon of the outburst at the mill. It was the gossip of the town by now, but to Spencer it was rather more than that. He thought he knew the other half of the tale, and he had perhaps a private reason for wishing to tell it. So he had walked across as soon as he had had his tea; and now, in Joe's small office, he soon had two alert listeners.

He began with an account of the man from Waterside who had come to him on the Thursday night, and the first mention of the kegs brought his hearers to full attention. But Spencer did not stop at that. He said he had not understood why the casks were wanted or where the money had come from. So he thought it his duty to learn a little more about this matter.

'Oh?' said Joe awkwardly, and Spencer began to bristle.

'What's all that about?' he asked.

'If you like to know your customers' business, that all right, but you needn't start talking about your ruddy duty. You can keep that for Sundays.'

'I'll keep all this for Sunday if you talk like that, and it won't be next Sunday. Do you want to hear it, or don't you?'

Robert intervened hastily.

'Yes, we do,' he said, 'and there's no need to quarrel. Let's hear the rest of it.'

'All right.' Spencer sat glaring at Joe for a moment. 'Just

shut up, will you, and stop trying to be funny? I'm not having it from you.'

'All right, then. Call it a joke.'

Spencer looked suspicious, perhaps not well understanding what a joke might be. But he had as good a reason for telling this tale as Joe had for hearing it, so he went on with it. He compromised with his dignity by addressing himself now to Robert.

He had thought it, he repeated, his duty to learn a little more about the affair. The casks had been ready when the man returned on the Friday evening with a handcart, when full darkness had come. He had paid for the casks, stacked them on the cart, and trundled it away into the darkness, and at once Spencer had extinguished the lantern and followed. There had been some mist about, with pools of darkness between the lighted windows of shops, and it had been easy for him to stay unnoticed. Nor had he far to go, merely a hundred yards of the street, and then the blackness of Colne Lane where all was dark. It had not been easy now to see the cart, and Spencer had closed the distance quickly, and only just in time.

'Oh?' said Robert softly.

'You've guessed right.' Spencer was sounding pleased with himself now. 'They had the gate open at Sutcliffe's, and there was a chap waiting to shut it when the cart went in. So now you know.'

Robert nodded, and already he was considering whether there might be a chance of bringing something home to Sutcliffe.

'Thanks for telling us,' he said quickly.

'Well, I thought it right,' said Spencer. 'We've all heard you've had a bit of trouble today, and with one thing and another—.'

'Aye,' said Joe. 'Specially another.'
'What the heck does that mean?'

'You don't like Sam Sutcliffe much, do you? Didn't he do some trick with a mortgage, and lay his hands on a farm of yours?' He shook his head sadly. 'That's Sam's trouble. Too sharp on t'brass. I've known 'em like that before.'

'I've known one or two myself, and not so far from here.'

'The love of money. It's the root of all evil.'

'Well, you should know.'

'Never mind.' Joe sat back, with a broad grin on his face.

'You did right to come, and if you'll walk up with me I'll stand you a pint.'

'Well, I don't mind if I do.' Spencer heaved himself suddenly to his feet. 'You know, it wasn't right of Sutcliffe, giving beer to weavers. It ought to be stopped.'

'Aye, beer's bad for 'em. But let's go and have that pint.

I don't like Sam too much myself.'

35

AFTERNOON IN PENDLE

THE next two weeks, against all expectations, were quiet. There was no more trouble. The damage to the looms was repaired and steam put to the engine again. The weavers, much to their own surprise, were allowed to return to their work, and they showed their feelings about that by putting their best into it. More and more looms were coupled to the shafting, and a hundred and eighty of them, with ninety weavers, were soon at work. The first batch of greveloth from the looms was sold in Manchester, and Dick Bradley sent back the money to set against a wage-bill of nearly thirty pounds a week. It was almost toogood to be true, and Joe chuckled happily as he crackled the banknotes between his fingers. He was in high good humour for the moment, and he made less trouble than he might have done when Robert had to admit to misjudging the space required by looms. There were twenty-eight more to use, and Joe made no more than a routine grumble when he gave up a ground-floor room to these. True, he did not need the space for his ironwork, but they were certainly a nuisance to him there.

His only other grumble was that Sam Sutcliffe was not in jall Joe certainly did his best at that. He learned not only when

and from whom Sutcliffe had bought fifty gallons of beer, but also that Lonsdale had on the same day bought five gallons of gin, presumably to mix with it. Joe therefore went to see the magistrates, and Harry Bolton, as the legal adviser, disgusted him by saying that there was no good case. Joe had to admit that the weavers had all been too drunk to remember how the kegs had come to the mill or who had brought them. and Bolton advised against a prosecution. Wood, rather reluctantly, agreed, but in private he spoke his mind plainly. He told both Sutcliffe and Lonsdale that he understood exactly what they had done, and that they might expect to have it remembered if they came before him on any other charge. He was known to be a man of his word, and the warning seemed to be effective. There was no more trouble, and Robert was satisfied with that. He would have been satisfied with anything that allowed him to develop his business, and Anna agreed vigorously.

'I don't care in the least about Sutcliffe,' she said. 'If he's been stopped from interfering, that's all that matters. How are the looms?'

'All working well.'

'How about Tom Thornber? Is it true that he's ready?'

'Yes. That's to say he's built his shed, and he's fitting the looms this week. He expects to start on Monday.'

. 'How about men?'

'Oh, he's getting them. I don't think he's getting the pick of them, but——'

'Then it sounds as if you might be able to keep your lead. Is there any more trouble in the town? Chartists and so on?'

'Not at the moment. Of course this Convention of theirs is talking about violence. And there's a fellow called Benbow—he's an old veteran of a speaker, an out-and-out troublemaker. He was here a while ago, with Stephens, addressing a mob by torchlight, and I'm told he's expected again next week. That might cause some trouble.'

'How about the pikes?'

'I don't know. I'm more concerned about Benbow.'

It was against this background that Robert first heard of Sam Cooper.

He heard of him from Dick Bradley, who still kept in touch with affairs in Waterside, and particularly with the talk at the Admiral Rodney there. Cooper, he said, was a stranger to the town, an offcomer, who gave it out that he was from Manchester. He was a strongly built man in his early thirties, with some rudiments of education, and he had suddenly appeared as a tapster at the Admiral Rodney. This had caused some surprise, since he looked a man who might have found a better job than drawing pints of beer for weavers, but Duxberry, the landlord, was not inclined to discuss it. Nor was Cooper, and he was certainly doing the job to everyone's satisfaction.

That in itself, of course, was trivial, but Dick had learned a little more. Cooper, he said, was a talkative fellow, with a friendly manner. He had soon come to easy terms with everybody, and it had been noticed that on some matters he was uncommonly well informed. He had predicted what the Northern Star would say last week, and he had been exactly right. He had said, before anybody else knew it, that William Benbow would come to the town soon, and again he seemed to be right. He knew all about Benbow's recent doings, where he had spoken and what he had said. He could explain every detail of what the Chartists were doing in Manchester. He knew something of pike drill, and the ways of teaching it, and he was so well informed about the Convention that he must surely have been in London very lately. All in all, said Dick, there was now a pretty general suspicion that Cooper was a Chartist agent, perhaps sent by the Manchester Chartists, perhaps by the Convention itself. He had already been told so to his face, and he had denied it quickly; but not, in a way that carried much conviction. In any case, as Dick remarked, it seemed the only good explanation of his coming to Colne at all.

There was enough in this to be disquieting, but Robert soon had something to add to it. Harry Hartley, the new tackler, had turned out to be very like his brother, as shrewd and friendly, and as willing for a chat about anything; and when Robert took a chance to ask him if he had heard of this man Cooper, Harry answered by confirming what Dick had said. But he added that if there was one man who knew Sam Cooper better than anybody else did, it was probably their own doorkeeper. Bill Harris.

Robert lost no time in asking what he meant, and Harry explained it cheerfully. Harris, he said, although he gave no liberties to anybody when he was at work, was showing himself a friendly fellow out of hours. He liked his pipe and his pint, and he was willing to chat with anybody over it. He was

becoming well known in the Admiral Rodney, and he met Chartists and everybody else with a good-humoured banter that often set them talking fiercely. Of late, however, he had seemed attracted by Cooper, and often, when the room was quiet and the tapster not too busy, the two of them would be yarning together. Of course they were both from Manchester, which no doubt gave them something to talk about, but it was growing into more than that. Harris seemed to like a political argument, and when he opposed the knowledgeable Cooper a whole circle would gather round, listening and commenting. In fact, said Harry, the Rodney was becoming a centre for Chartist talk, and Duxberry must be rubbing his hands with satisfaction. He was certainly selling the beer.

Robert, of course, had a clue to this that was withheld from Harry, and he had no doubt that Sergeant Harris of the Metropolitan Police was keeping a close watch on the agent Cooper. Even so, the news was disquieting. Harris however good he might be, was alone. He might give warning to the Justices of coming trouble, but he could not supply the force that would put it down, and Cooper was not likely to give all his thoughts away. He might even be meeting one deception with another.

But for the moment all was quiet. It was so quiet that more interest was given to Tom Thornber's weaving troubles than to anything else. Tom had installed his looms and hired his men, and everything should therefore have gone smoothly. Rumour, however, began to say otherwise, and Joe went ambling down to Vivary Bridge to have a look. He came back amused.

'They're in a right mess,' he said. 'Tom's near mad. There's half the looms bust, and you should see what's coming from the others. Talk about cloth! It's about fit for the carding room again, if you ask me.'

'But why's that?'

'They don't know what they're doing. Tom's been so busy looking for a tackler cheap that he hasn't thought how to tent the looms. No one else had either, and you wouldn't believe what they're doing. The loomer's near having kittens, and Tom's hopping and damning like that chap we had last week preaching about sin. You'd better go and look at him.'

But Robert thought he had better not. His own long work at the looms had saved him from these blunders, and he had no wish to look triumphant. But he did mention it to Nicholas, who heard the tale without surprise. 'That's like Tom,' he said. 'He always learns by knocking his head. Of course it's that sort of head, but he does learn in the end.'

So the peace, for the moment, was holding. William Benbow descended on the town, exactly on the day that Sam Cooper had foretold, and delivered a truculent speech about what the workers would do if the Charter were not made law. There was a deal of noise from his excited audience, but no riot or damage. The Justices looked happier, and Nicholas went off to Manchester for yet another meeting of the Anti-Corn-Law Association. Then Dick Sagar was ready with a weaving shed. In his early days, before he took to cotton, he had been a weaver of worsted, and he thought he could profit now from this experience with wool. He tried to weave muslin-de-laine, which was a half-and-half cloth, with a warp of wool and a weft of cotton, and the attempt was not a success. The power-looms were not well suited to the stuff, and after two weeks of trouble he cut his losses and gave it up. In another week he was weaving a cotton greycloth, like Shaw & Hoyle, but even his false attempt was of use to the town. The putters-out, now in full retreat before the power-looms, took their chance with the promptness of despair. They knew now that they could not stem the tide, but here was a quiet backwater where they might keep affoat for a few years more. One after another they entered it. and muslin-de-laine was soon the accepted trade for the handlooms and the putters out. It was a small quiet trade, giving them nothing like their former status, but it kept them afloat and removed them from desperation. Never again did they make any serious fight against the power-looms.

So Easter came and went, and there was a warmth of spring in the air. Harry Holroyd opened his weaving shed in hot pursuit of Sagar, and at Victoria mill the looms were clacking from seven till seven as the coals were fed to the boiler, and the engine gave its full ten horsepower. It was intoxicating and heartening, giving new hope and confidence. Then, in the middle of April, the weather leaped suddenly to the warmth of May, pale blue skies in the mornings, golden sunlight in the afternoons, and John remarked at Greenfield that these were days for riding. He offered the loan of horses, and Anna was vivid in the sunlit window as she answered that she still had a riding habit. There was a sparkle in her eyes, and Robert did what he had never done before. He took an afternoon away

from work, leaving the mill to run itself, and he found Anna in a leaf-green serge that looked as if it had been made for spring. It all but matched the new young grass, and it was almost startling in these sober days when fashions were tending more and more to black or the darkest grey. But Anna had the qualities that could carry it, and she looked very willing to brighten any countryside.

They rode out together in the clear sunlight of the afternoon. and they turned along the towpath of the canal to Wanless and a remembered wharf. It was deserted and sleepy this afternoon, but the water was rippling in a gentle wind, and in the garden of the Grinning Rat a man was digging purposefully. They looked at each other and the wharf with a slow happy smile of memory, and then they walked the horses over the steep arch of the bridge and so to a forgotten road that climbed to the west, narrow and neglected, with the green grass springing between the stones. The canal passed out of view behind them as they crossed a ridge, and then they were utterly alone on this forgotten road, with nothing in view to tell of looms or cotton, and no sound but the horses and the wind. There was a warmth in the sun to tell of coming summer, and a blue sky above them, flecked with soft white cloud. Anna looked round her, and breathed deeply.

'It's hard to believe, she said suddenly. 'It's all so peaceful. In the town there's always somebody quarrelling, or somebody worried, or somebody frightened for what's coming. But up

here it's as God meant it to be.'

'Perhaps a town is, too. It's a part of creation. But I thought

you believed in towns?'

'I do really.' She was smiling almost ruefully as she looked again at the thin grass and the lonely road. 'I know quite well what sort of a living you can scratch from ground like this, and of course I do know that all those folk in a town must have a proper trade. That's where your power-looms help, and the railways that Nick keeps talking of. But, still——'

The smile had faded altogether, and she did not even look round her now. She seemed more intent on her horse and the

grass-grown road.

'Will it be as bad as they say?' she asked suddenly. 'War, and men fighting with pikes?'

'Nobody knows. We're all waiting for this Convention.'

'Why does it do nothing?'

'Because it doesn't know what to do.'

'Well, don't let's talk about it now. Where are we?'

They had come to a crossroads inn, quiet and lonely, and they drew rein while he explained it.

'This is the old Gisburn road, turning away here. But we can go on and meet the new road.'

'Very well.'

Another half-mile brought them to a fine turnpike, climbing steadily up the shoulder of the hill. In a few minutes more they were nearing the top, and the turnpike was swinging away to the north. To their left a lesser road ran down, and once again they halted.

'Where does it go to?' she asked.

'Pendle Forest. Shall we go down?'

They left the turnpike and went jogging down the narrow road, with the ground rising high to their right, and the beginnings of a river flowing quietly on their left. The road was dropping steeply, and then, for a little way, it ran between grassy banks, and a little stream was coming from the heights, winding past a wooden knoll and then splashing across the road to join the river. It was a chance to water the horses, and they dismounted, standing with the stream rippling round their boots as they held the bridles loosely.

'Did you know I'm leaving Greenfield?' said Anna.

'Leaving! Anna, you don't---'

'Don't look so upset.' The ripple of her laugh seemed to blend with the stream. 'I'm not going far. Nick's been asking me when I'll remember him again, so I've said I'll go and stay with him. You sounded quite upset.' She settled herself easily in her saddle, and then looked at him with amusement in her eyes. 'I was asked to go back to Bingley, but Nick says I mustn't.'

'Quite right.' He found his stirrup without taking his eyes from her. 'You must not go running away again like that.'

'I can't live on my friends for ever.'

'No one's asking you to. Anna, you know very well what I want, and what I ask of you.'

'Do I?'

She looked him straight in the eye, and he was sorry now that they had mounted the horses. He would have liked to be closer to her than this, and he edged as close as he could while they jogged lazily along what was now a level road. He saw her lean face pucker in the sunlight as she seemed to consider something. Then she spoke quietly.

'I should have thought I was well placed with Nick. If your work gives chance for any more afternoons like this, we—we might even get to know each other.'

'But don't we?'

'Not in all ways. It seems quite a time since we talked of anything but gasworks and power-looms.'

'Well, I know, but---'

'I'm not saying they aren't important, but they aren't the whole of life.'

'I know that.'

'Don't think I'm blaming you because you've been filled with those other things. It had to be so, and we aren't at the end yet.'

To their right a substantial house of stone had come into view, graceful and well proportioned, set back from the road in proper dignity. Anna looked at it with half an interest while her thoughts seemed to lead her on.

'That's why it's good for us to come out here when we can. In the town it's all squabbling, but out here it's different. Pigs and sheep, neighbour standing with neighbour, and the only fear is the bad harvest. What's the house there?'

'It's called Rough Lee. I don't know what it is.'

She had lapsed into silence again as they went jogging down the peaceful road, riding almost knee to knee. The river was alongside now, under a fringe of trees, and as they went round a bend a group of sheep went scampering from the road to huddle against the river as the noise of hooves went by. Certainly it was peaceful, far from all strife of men, and he began to understand what had put Anna in her present mood. Yet he found himself glancing at her curiously.

'You once told me,' he said, 'that you'd had enough of

country life at Broughton.'

'That's why I'm willing to live in a town. We need towns now, if we're all to have a living, and we need the steam and the looms and the railways. There's no doubt about that. The point is that they aren't natural, and we have to learn to live with them.'

'I should have thought you were rather out of the town at Greenfield.'

'The troubles can affect John, and he's worried. In a place

like this a corn miller would have a peaceful life. What's up there?'

She pointed to the right, where the road climbed steeply up, and he had to search his memory.

'A village called Barley,' he said. 'And up beyond it there is a corn mill, a really old one. A place called Wheathead.'

'A place for a peaceful life, I should say, and no worries. John seems to have paid a lot of money for that new steam engine, and now there isn't trade enough even for his water wheel. It's going to the steam mills in the towns, of course.'

'I was afraid it would. What will he do?'

'I don't——' She hesitated for an instant. 'I can't say what he'll do. But I don't like our John worried.'

'No.' He answered quickly, and then he went back to what concerned him most. 'But you're not going to leave the town, are you? Promise me that you'll stay?'

'I might have to leave.'

'No, you won't.' Again he was regretting the horses that kept them that little space apart. 'Anna, there's no reason why you should ever go away again now. You can stay here for always, with me. You know how I want you.'

'Do I?' She answered softly, and her tone was nicely between the light and the earnest. 'But I did say you don't know me very well. You don't know me in peaceful days.'

'Why do you keep putting me off?'

'Because—' She stopped, and for a moment she was looking down at her horse. Then he heard the soft intake of her breath as she turned to face him. 'Ever since you knew me, you've had your head full of affairs. They've been pressing on you, the new work with Nick, the gasworks, this partnership, and the looms and the Chartists. It's been one thing after another, and it's only been now and then that you've been able to think of me.'

'Oh, no.'

'Oh, yes.' She corrected him promptly, and gave him no chance to speak. 'A man gives to a woman as much thought as he can spare from his work. And a woman—well, perhaps she gives her work as much thought as she can spare from the man. No, don't look at me like that. It's true.'

'But-but what are you telling me?'

'That I've given more thought to this than you have, so I know rather more about it. That's true, Robert, whatever you

may think. Perhaps it's the woman's part to know more about it. Listen——' She stopped her horse, close against his, and suddenly her hand was on his arm. 'I've said you don't know me as well as you think you do.'

'Yes, but—'

'I'll promise you this.' Her eyes were steadily on him as she cut him short. 'I won't leave Nick and go off to Yorkshire or anywhere unless I really have to. 'I'll stay here. Will that do?'

'But if you'd only say---'

'What more could I say? You make this a little difficult for me.'

'Anna, I never meant---'

'I don't suppose you did. You aren't very good at this sort of thing.'

'You certainly make me think I'm not.'

'I'm sorry.' She looked at him strangely, and suddenly her face changed. An eyebrow quivered in the remembered style, and then she was smiling as she spoke again. 'Well then, that's settled, And in the meantime——'

'Yes?'

'If you ask me to come to these peaceful places again, I'll come.'

'Well---'

He paused, a little suspicious and not quite satisfied, and he saw her watching him. Then the eyebrow lifted further, and her voice took a remembered tone.

'If, of course, you can find time from your affairs.'

'I'll find it.'

'It won't be easy.'

'I'll find it somehow.'

'That's better. I think we shall like Pendle. The air must be good for you.'

WHITSUNTIDE

APRIL ran quickly out, and then the shadow of Whitsuntide lay upon them, when everybody seemed to agree that trouble could be expected. There were several reasons for this, and they began in London. The Government had run into trouble in a debate about Jamaica, and Lord Melbourne, the Prime Minister, promptly resigned. Nobody took this very seriously, it being generally believed that he would soon be back in office; as, in fact he was. But in the meantime there was no government; and the Convention seized on this as a reason for delay. It announced that it could not now present the Charter, and would therefore adjourn until July.

Some consequences were not hard to foresee. Chartists all over the country, most of them raw and simple, had been in a fever of expectation for weeks, and they were now being told that they were to wait some further weeks; and all over Waterside, and in the similar streets of other towns they were soon saying what they thought about it. It was plain that the delegates would have to explain things to their followers, which meant touring what they now called their constituencies and making any sort of speech that would divert attention from what they had really done. In the north of England this meant Whitsuntide, traditionally a time for speeches, meetings, and uproars; and it was soon put about in Colne that the local delegate, Jack Stone, would make a speech on the Saturday before Whit Sunday. Hard on this announcement came another, seeming to come from Sam Cooper the tapster, who was generally regarded now as the mouthpiece of William Benbow. Cooper let it be known that Benbow was not satisfied with Jack Stone, and therefore meant to keep an eye on this Whitsuntide speech; and if he thought it not good enough he would come to Colne himself and make a better one. Which, as the Hole i' th' Wall agreed, seemed to be a promise that if Stone did not cause trouble Benbow would.

The magistrates took alarm. They had been asking, for months past, for a military garrison, and now they put out an appeal for Special Constables. Some sort of force at their command they said, was essential, and they asked for volunteers. The result was that out of some nine thousand available men twenty-six came forward, and every one of them was a man of property. The magistrates were appalled, thinking that the whole town must have turned Chartist, until Sergeant Harris reported that the true cause of the bad response was intimidation. The truth was, he said, that the convinced Chartists did not amount to more than one man in twenty, perhaps five hundred at the most, but they were a compact and resolute body, and they had let the rest of the town know very plainly what any man might expect if he were seen in the streets with an armlet, opposing the People's Charter. The threat had been effective; but there were plenty of men in the town, said Harris, who were better disposed to the law than they were to the Charter.

One resort remained to the magistrates. The Government had put some preparations in train before it resigned, and Lord John Russell, at the Home Office, had informed all magistrates that if they chose to use their powers to impress some Special Constables he would supply arms and equipment. It was this power that the magistrates in Colne now put to use. They impressed one hundred Special Constables in addition to their twenty-six volunteers. They applied to the Home Office for the arms, and then they set their tiny force to drilling. That was all they could do, and nothing now remained but to wait for Whitsuntide and Jack Stone; and perhaps for Benbow too, who had once been a cobbler, and was now the firebrand of the North.

This was an anxiety not confined to Colne. It was felt all over the North, and particularly in Manchester, which was the very hotbed of Chartism. It had its effect on the cloth market there, and Dick Bradley thought it best to report in writing about his latest sale of greycloth. This upset Joe, and he was not in the best of humours when he spoke to Robert about it.

'Hey, what's this?' he asked. 'It's not dam' well good enough.'
Robert, desperately worried about it himself, tried to stick
up for Dick, who had done all that was possible.

'I thought it was fairly good, considering the market.'

'Good!' Joe thrust the paper almost under his nose. 'Take another look.'

But Robert knew only too well what the report said. In the previous week they had sent two hundred and twenty pieces

of cloth to Manchester, and Dick had sold them all. In this last week, with all the looms now running, they had sent two hundred and seventy pieces, and Dick had sold two hundred and six. The price had fallen sharply, so that what had been a ten-per-cent profit was now a one-per-cent loss; and sixty-four pieces remained unsold. Robert did not need to look again.

'I still think,' he said firmly, 'that Dick has done pretty well

for us, considering the market.'

'What's wrong with the market?'

'What would you do if you were a cloth merchant just now? If you had a warehouse that could be burned at any time, would you fill it with cloth or would you keep your money in the bank?'

'Who's talking of burning warehouses?'

'I should think a good many people are.'

'You can insure a warehouse, can't you?'

'I'm not sure that you can, against Chartists, and it isn't our business anyway. If the merchants choose to hang on to their money we can't stop them. And I think that's what they're doing.'

'They damned well are.' Joe flapped the paper angrily. 'Have

you seen the price he's sold at?'

'What else could he do if they wouldn't pay more?'

'We're paying him to sell the stuff, aren't we? That doesn't mean sell it at a loss. We've sixty-four pieces left unsold, and we can't go on like this. We've worked all week for nothing, and we've laid out money on cloth we can't sell. What's it to be this week?'

'I don't suppose it'll be much better. But what can we do?'

'You can do two things.' Joe flung the paper angrily on the table. 'First of all you can go and talk to Crook and Nick England and the rest of 'em. How many pieces of cloth did they say they'd take from us?'

'When they were asking us to open? Well, of course they

did make a promise, but it wasn't for us alone.'

'You needn't mind about the others. They can take sixty-four of our pieces right off.'

'I don't want to do that yet, Joe.'

'You can talk like that when it's your own money. I'm paying for all this, let me tell you, and I'm fed up with it. You can just go and see Crook and the others.'

Robert felt an angry flush in his cheeks at the tone of it,

but he knew only too well that they were living on Joe's money. He had to make the best of it.

'Very well,' he said tightly. 'But I don't suppose they'll pay more than the merchants have done, and that means a loss.'

'They'll pay cost price. Fair price was what they said, and that's it. Now there's something else that you can do. You can cut down what we're paying out. It's dam' ridiculous. I've been looking at Thornber's rates of pay. Do you know how much below ours they are?'

'I didn't fix our rates by thinking of Thornber. I fixed those rates to give about eight shillings a week to a weaver, which is not too much for any man. In any case, we aren't dropping those rates much. That's the mistake the putting-out men made, and you know what followed.'

'And suppose I say that I'm not finding the money for those rates?'

'Then I'll find myself another partner.' He flung the answer back, knowing that the threat must come at some time if he were to deal with Joe at all. Inwardly he felt sickeningly nervous as he thought of the response that Joe could make, but that had to be hidden. He kept his voice steady as he went quickly on. 'If we make a promise to these men we must keep it, and I mean to go on like that.'

'Aye, but—' For a moment Joe stared mutinously at him.

'But you might think what it costs.'

'And what it's worth to be called a good firm.'

'Oh well, have it your own way.'

It was Joe in retreat, hiding it behind the grumbling tone, and for an instant Robert was triumphant. Then, in quick relief that it had passed, he changed his tone as he tried to pretend that nothing had happened.

'Then that's all right,' he said. 'And if you really think we

ought to be rid of that cloth, I'll see Crook about it.'

'Aye, you'd better. I don't want too much money laid out just now. It's not safe.'

Robert had a word with Barnard Crook that same afternoon, and to his relief the talk was friendly. Crook showed respect for his promise.

'I'm glad it's only sixty,' he said. 'Of course Sagar and Holroyd said they'd take their share, but I don't think we can expect that now. But I'll have a talk with some of the others, and we'll take those sixty pieces.'

Robert found himself more disturbed than he had expected by his brush with Joe. It had passed off quietly, but it could happen again, and perhaps with a different ending. He took the chance to mention it that evening when he was at Cumberland House, and Nicholas gave him a confident answer.

'Joe's trying to do the same as the Manchester men, and keep

his money in the Bank. I don't blame him, just now.'

'But you don't think I was wrong to stand up to him?'

'You can't be wrong if you stand up to Joe. I did once tell you he just wanted someone to run his looms for him. That's the trouble, and he won't get any better.'

'Precisely,' said Anna calmly. She had been listening to this in silence, and now she suddenly thrust herself into it. 'Nick's

right. He won't get any better.'

'Then what do you expect will happen?'

'You'll part company. I've told you that before. It might be quite a long time, of course.'

'I hope so.'

'Ye-es.' She seemed to linger on the word. 'But if it does come sooner, I think you'll find somebody else.'

'Who?'

'I—I really couldn't say.' Her tone altered suddenly. 'But it may be better next week. Everything may be better if we can get through Whitsuntide.'

'Specially in Manchester,' said Nicholas. 'What happens

there will affect the market, and you'd better watch it.'

Robert did watch it. But Colonel Wemyss, commanding in Manchester, had nearly two thousand men with some cavalry and guns, which was a force that nobody could challenge, and Manchester staved quiet. In Colne, too, the expected trouble was avoided. Jack Stone, the delegate to the Convention, arrived as had been foretold, and had a great deal to say about the Charter and the People's Will, but nothing at all about pikes and clubs; which was certainly a disappointment to the active Chartists, who had been restraining themselves for weeks past until their Convention should give the word. Stone gave them nothing at all, and soon they were regretting that they had ever elected so timid a fellow as their delegate. The greater number of folk, who were more interested in work and wages than in the Charter kept quiet and said nothing. Then the news came that the Manchester cloth market was recovering. Prices rose to almost what they had been, and Dick Bradley was able to sell the whole of that week's batch. Even Joe looked pleased. So did everybody else, until a tale came that Benbow had been seen in Colne.

It was brought to Robert by Harry Hartley on the Thursday morning. He said that Benbow had been brought into the Rodney the previous night by half a dozen of the most confirmed Chartists in the town, who had apparently been having some sort of meeting with him. He had given his name as Watson, but one or two of the company had recognized him at sight, particularly, perhaps, Sam Cooper, who had stared very hard at him, and had then put up a pretence of not having seen him before. But the two men had seemed to come to terms remarkably quickly, and for the next hour they had had their heads as close together as Cooper's work as tapster could allow. Benbow had then departed with his friends, but no one doubted that he was exceedingly dissatisfied with Jack Stone's recent speech and meant to do what he could to put it right. There was no hint, however, of how he meant to do it.

It was no longer in Robert's routine to arrive at the mill at exactly seven o'clock each morning. He was a master now, and custom held it to be wrong that a master should be jostled by his own workpeople. He should walk in dignity, when the clogs had passed, and this was what Robert now did. He would get up from his breakfast when he heard the clogs under his window, but he did not leave the house until he heard the factory whistles blow. But on the Saturday morning he was jerked to attention by the sound of a distant whistle while he was still at his breakfast. He looked hurriedly at his watch, which said twenty minutes to seven. Then he flung open the window and pushed his head into the cool sunlight of a May morning. The street was all but deserted, and only here and there did a clog clatter on the stones, but the howl of the whistle was clear and penetrating, from somewhere far down the street, which meant that it must be Tom Thornber's. There was no other whistle in that direction. Robert thought that someone must have blundered, or perhaps be drunk, at Vivary Bridge, and he forgot all about it until he stepped out of the house just as the noise of their own whistle died away from Victoria mill. Then the street was quiet, and in the silence he heard again the shrill high wail from Vivary Bridge. He heard it with surprise, wondering if it had been blowing continuously since twenty to seven. But at the corner of Colne Lane he

met Joe, also on his way to the mill, and Joe spoke of it at once.

'What the heck?' he said. 'It's been going all through breakfast. Tom must be off his head.'

'Perhaps they've had some trouble with the whistle.'

'It's a dam' good way of wasting steam. Whistles just drink it, and Tom's close with his coal.' Joe chuckled happily. 'I'll bet he's laying into that tenter.'

They went down the lane together. But twenty minutes later a lad who had been sent outside reported that the Vivary Bridge whistle was still blowing, but only faintly. It was dying away, he said, as if the steam might be failing, and Joe went outside to listen for himself. Half-way through the morning he slipped out for a pint, as he often did when things were quiet, and when he returned he called Robert to the office. He had no longer any look of amusement.

'Nice to-do down yonder,' he declared. 'It's been a near thing.'

He went crisply on to explain it. At Vivarv Bridge it was the duty of the tenter and his stoker to rake the fires each morning in time to send the steam to working pressure by seven o'clock. On this Saturday morning they had arrived as usual at a quarter past six, and had found that they could not get into the boiler house. The lock had jammed, and through the tight shut door they could hear the roaring of fires that were certainly not damped down. Worse still was a deeper noise from the boilers themselves, and a groaning and creaking of their plates. Someone had evidently been here earlier to stoke the fires and raise the steam to danger point. It was, indeed, beyond the danger point, and the tenter guessed that explosion could come at any moment. He ran to the adjoining engine-house, with the thought of opening the regulators wide and letting the steam expend itself in the engines, and once more he found that the lock was jammed. It was a moment to test a man, but the tenter had kept his head. He sent the doorkeeper running to rouse Tom Thornber, and then he and his stoker flung themselves at the door with fire-axes. They chose the engine-house door, as being now the safer one to work at, and they were a full ten minutes, with Tom now raging with an axe beside them, before they splintered their way through the oak. They rushed in over the ruin of it, and they found that they had wasted their time. Someone had been thinking ahead of them,

and the regulator levers of the engines had been sawn off at the bases. There was no quick way in which the valves could be opened; and through the wall they could hear the drone of the straining boilers.

The tenter had his wits still clear, and he tied down the lanvard of the whistle before he rushed out after the others. They were already battering at the door of the boiler-house, and above them the whistle was howling as it had never done before, the steam from it leaping the whole height of the chimney. It was the only way they had of wasting steam, and it must have given some respite to the seething boilers. Another ten minutes passed before the axes gave them entry, and then, in the roasting inferno of the boiler-house they found that the fires had been stoked to the limit and the safety valves of the boilers screwed hard down. The threads had been battered with a hammer after that, and there was no time now to deal with that. Tom gave the lead at once, and he and his two men risked their lives in raking out the fires, flinging the flaming coals into the air and sunlight of the morning. It was past seven o'clock when they had done it, and then, for another hour, there was steam in the boilers, and high on the chimney the whistle was howling above a useless mill. But it was a noise that had perhaps saved their lives.

37

TRUNCHEONS

By NIGHTFALL the affair was being discussed by everyone. That it had been deliberate was not to be doubted, and they all agreed that the timing of it had a murderous significance. If the intention had merely been to explode the boilers it could best have been done in the small hours of the night, when there

would have been no need to iam the locks and cut the regulators. What had been done looked more like an attempt to cause an explosion at a time when men would be in the danger zone; particularly, of course, Tom Thornber, who was perhaps more hated by the Chartists than anybody else. Tom remarked that it had been a damned near thing. He said that his mill would be stopped for at least a week, and probably longer. New regulator levers would have to be made, and both boilers examined by their makers. He was doing all he could about it, but in the meantime he had paid off all his men and told them they could come back when they were sent for. Until then, they would have to feed their families as best they could. He grunted angrily when somebody told him that this looked as good a way as any to turn them into Chartists. and he retorted that the Chartists should have thought of that before they fired his boilers. He did not seem to understand that it might have been precisely what the Chartists wanted.

So the talk came back to Chartists, to Benbow again, and the speech he was to make next day. He was to speak on Colne Field during Sunday afternoon, and Sam Cooper, down at the Admiral Rodney, had been heard to say that it would be a speech worth hearing. The Justices called on their hundred and twenty-six Special Constables, and Robert was with the others outside Bolton's office at two o'clock that afternoon. where he was quickly provided with an armband and a truncheon. Then Wood led them to the Field, where for the next hour they did nothing but stand behind the crowd and listen to William Benbow. Nothing else was possible. Benbow stood on a wagon, and on every side the Chartists stood round him, three or four hundred of them, in disciplined ranks. They were at least as well armed as the Specials, three times as numerous and probably more determined, and Wood must have known from the outset that there was nothing he could do, whatever cause for interference he might find in Benbow's speech.

He found ample cause. Suddenly Benbow flung out an accusing arm. Who were these fellows at the back, these Justices' bludgeon-men? What were they doing at a People's meeting? His arm pointed dramatically, and there was a stir throughout the crowd as faces turned in their hundreds to see the thin rank of Specials standing at the back. Then the big

rough voice was heard again as Benbow shouted to his followers to sweep the field of these catchpolls. Wasn't there a river somewhere that the rogues could be flung into? And let that be reported to the Home Office, since the magistrates reported so much. It might cool someone's temper.

A man who had charge of the Chartist bodyguard began shouting orders. The ranks of men turned. Clubs lifted and then lav sloped on shoulders. The crowd swaved, and Benbow leaned from the wagon to harangue the men who formed his guard. The Specials watched unhappily, seeing the odds, and knowing all too well that they were not trained as fighting men. Then Wood took a quick decision, and one that must have needed courage. At once, with no argument or delay, he marched his men from the Field, taking them down the street to the office they had started from. They went at his command. and perhaps not unwillingly, though there were some red and heated faces among them as they heard the gale of laughter from the crowd and the howl from the Chartists. Wood ignored both. He marched firmly alongside his men, his lean face white and hard, and he took hardly a glance over his shoulder as the retreat continued. For retreat it plainly was, even though it was done in good order. It was a retreat from a force they could not meet, and it left the Chartists in possession of the Field.

This was the month of May, when the daylight would last till nine o'clock or later, and there was still time for trouble. So Wood kept his force together, and he spoke to them trenchantly when they were back by Bolton's office. It was the nature of a mob, he said, that it never held together for very long, and this would be no exception. Soon it would break up, and they could then deal easily enough with any group that tried to make trouble. That was their work as Special Constables, and he did not mean to bring them into action until conditions suited them. In the meantime they were to stay close at hand.

It was bravely said, and he did not add that he had already sent a man riding hard to Burnley to ask help of the cavalry. It was then five o'clock of this Sunday afternoon. Already, from up the street, they could hear the steady roar of clogs by the hundred coming down from the Field, and Wood thought it wise to withdraw his men to the side streets while Benbow made a triumphant progress to the Red Lion, where a meal

awaited him; and it was while he was at it, with the ranks of his followers still on guard outside, that the messenger rode back from the barracks to say that aid of cavalry was refused, the commanding officer having enough on his hands in Burnley. This news, also, a tight-lipped magistrate kept to himself.

But Wood had judged the matter well, and his predictions about the mob came true. Already the crowd was breaking up. They had had their afternoon, and they did not see much sense in standing outside the Red Lion while Benbow had his tea. They went to their own teas instead, those who had any to go to, and soon the street looked almost empty. Only the ranks of the Chartist bodyguard remained, and even these had thinned. Scarcely two hundred of them were there when Benbow at last came out, booted for riding now, and acknowledging their cheers like one who is used to ovations. A halfdozen of his followers stood by the door as a horse was brought round, and then the ordered ranks of the guard dissolved into a cheering crowd as he mounted and rode away. He went trotting down the street, and the cheering Chartists had had a splendid afternoon. But they wanted food and they wanted beer, and they quickly dispersed in search of both.

That gave an hour or two of quiet, and it was getting on towards sunset before small groups of men began to emerge from the beer-shops, shouting and bawling. But anything like a concerted plan had been forgotten, and the inner half-dozen, who had had tea with Benbow, had disappeared for some conclave of their own. The lurching men in the streets were without leaders, and control of the town passed easily enough to Wood, who had kept his men in readiness and knew exactly what he was doing. He sent his men out in groups of twenty, with orders to deal firmly with any disturbances they might find: and their memories of the humiliating afternoon soon spurred them to assert themselves. Many of them had abandoned the official truncheons for something more familiar, and in a brawl by Holroyd's factory Robert saw Nicholas swinging a hunting crop. Joe was using his boots, and Tom Thornber was showing a vicious skill with a buckled belt. The results were devastating, and by nine o'clock the crushing of disorder had gone so far that Wood was able to release from further duty the parties he had sent out first.

Robert's was one of these, and he was promptly carried off by Nicholas to supper at Cumberland House, where they were made something more than welcome by an anxious Ellen, with Anna close at her side. Tom and Susie, more excited than frightened, were full of questions, and were firmly put off. Nicholas declaring that both he and Robert were far too hungry to talk to anybody. Would Susie please get them a drink?

They came to talk later, when they had all moved to the parlour that overlooked the street from above the stairs. It was quite dark now, and the curtains had been drawn across the windows and the gas lighted in the crystal chandelier. A fire had been put in the hearth at dusk, and Nicholas settled himself in front of it, stretching out his legs and holding his brandy to catch the light.

'Aye,' he said lazily, 'it's not been the sort of Sunday I like, but we can't help that.' He turned suddenly to Robert. 'You know, Wood was right to march us away this afternoon, and it doesn't matter how much they laughed. We couldn't have dealt with all that lot when they were sober, and if we'd have been smashed up this afternoon you can guess what it would have been like tonight. It's not too good now.'

He cocked his head suddenly as a sound of shouting came in, accompanied by what seemed to be the rattle of breaking glass. The shouting died away, and in the bright light of the room Ellen burst suddenly into the talk. She perhaps thought she

had been quiet for long enough.

'I don't know what we're coming to,' she said, 'when we have men fighting each other in the streets on a Sunday night. When I was a girl we used to sit round Father on a Sunday night, and he'd go through the morning's sermon with us, making sure we'd understood it.'

'I hope you had.'

'Of course we had. Sermons were sermons in those days, and properly set out, all under headings, and then——'

'I don't think you had Chartists to upset them.'

'No, and not to shout in the street, either.' She listened for a moment as another outburst came. 'And if this is what comes of your gas and your railway trains, I don't like it. And I don't like my husband out at night with a hunting crop either, whether it's Sunday night or not.'

'I don't like it myself, but it hasn't anything to do with

railway trains.'

'Oh yes, it has. Everybody's running about making gas and

boiling water and I don't know what else, and if you turn everything upside down everything will be upside down, and that's what wrong with Chartists. It's the bottom trying to come to the top, and well you know it.'

'Yes, but---'

The crash of breaking glass ripped suddenly through the room. The curtains came swaying as they stopped the hurtling stone. It thudded to the floor, followed by a tinkle of glass as a second stone came flying. In the room they had all jerked back, and young Tom jumped on a chair, reaching to the chandelier. A roar of voices from the street told that he had been seen through the parted curtains, and two more stones came splintering through the windows as he reached for the taps. Then the hissing of the gas jets died away, the harsh glare faded, and the room sank into the softness of firelight.

'Come along!' Nicholas flung the door open sharply. 'Out of here. Go to the dining-room till it's quiet. Quickly, please.'

They obeyed him in silence, all but Ellen. Anna, her face taut in the firelight, had moved close to Robert, Tom had Susie by the arm to make sure of her. But Ellen turned in the doorway to look at the litter of glass that had fallen through the curtains.

'Upside down,' she said again. 'Everybody used to have a place and know what it was, and I'm sure they were much happier like that. And now look at it, all over the carpet and

it's Sunday night too.'

She was hustled after the others. Then Nicholas went striding back to the parlour, with Robert at his side and Tom following behind, and the noise from the street was louder now. Tom moved too near the window, perhaps forgetting the firelight, and as soon as he was seen there was another roar of voices and a whole volley of stones came crashing at the window. One of them hit the chandelier, and Robert went jumping back as a shower of glass came down. Tom had already leaped to safety.

'Where's the truncheon party?' asked Nicholas calmly.

'Hasn't Wood heard this lot?'

'He will soon, by the noise they're making. I suppose they're drunk?'

'Half and half. We're all right for a few minutes, if we keep back.'

He had hardly spoken when the attack changed ominously.

Down below them, on the locked and bolted door, a thunderous hammering broke out, and the whole front of the house seemed to shake from something that was battering with a vicious force. The floor quivered under their feet, and from below there was a rending of timber to hint that the door would not hold long against this treatment.

'Hell!' said Nicholas.

He betrayed his thoughts by a quick glance at the diningroom, where the women were. Then, with the last trace of good nature gone from his face, he moved abruptly to a chest of drawers against the wall. With one darting movement he pulled a drawer open, and from it he took a pair of pistols, black and shining, and obviously ready for use. Quickly he handed one to Robert, and the other, after a moment of hesitation, to Tom. He snatched a second pair from the drawer, keeping both of these to himself, after a quick look at the hammers. Then he turned sharply.

'Come on,' he said grimly. 'There's nothing else for it. We

can't risk these fellows in the house.'

He led quickly from the room, past the open door of the dining-room, where Ellen was peeping out with Anna holding her arm, and he told her curtly to stay where she was. Then he went down the darkened stair, and Robert, following him, felt a sense of shock at the feel of the pistol in his hand, and the thought that Nicholas should keep these things in his house. Pistols were things he had not associated with mill owners, and Cumberland House. Yet here it was in his hand, and it was Sunday night, and men were battering at the door.

He remembered that he must pull the hammer back before it would shoot, and rather fearfully he did so as they stood by the door. He glanced back up the stair, and saw Ellen looking down with Anna still at her side. He saw Anna's lips move, but he could hear nothing for the deafening noise on the door. He tried hurriedly to reckon the time, and decided that perhaps two minutes had passed since the first thunder on the door.

'When the door gives,' said Nicholas. 'I'll shoot the first man in. We mustn't wait to be rushed.'

Robert grasped the pistol a shade more firmly, and he had a cold sickening feeling that this was a fantasy and nightmare, and that in some few moments more it might be worse; that he, an Inghamite and a decent weaving-master, might then be committing murder, on a Sunday night. But that was not

needed. A rush of booted feet was heard, voices rang high in shouted warning, and then it was a chaos of shouting and stamping, cries of pain and the unmistakable thud of truncheons. The Special Constables had arrived, perhaps within three minutes of the outbreak, and it sounded as if they were in no gentle mood. For some few seconds the sounds rose to fury, and then the shouts were moving up the street. Suddenly the fighting had turned to pursuit, and quite calmly Nicholas unbolted the door and pulled it open.

It was not quite dark. There was light enough to show the shape of things, and up and down the street there were folk peering anxiously from upper windows. A Special Constable was being helped to his feet, and another was leaning against a house, dabbing at his head. Here and there a man was limping away, or helping another who was in trouble; and exactly by Cumberland House a man was prone in the gutter, very quiet and still. Nicholas glanced at him, and then stepped past to inquire about the two hurt Specials. Robert dropped on one knee by the silent man, fearful that death had struck at last. It was too dark to see what had happened, but he cautiously touched the man's head, and felt what he was sure was blood. He bent low, listening for any sound of breathing, and to his infinite thankfulness he heard a sigh, and then a faint moan, as proof that life was there.

Then a shaft of mellow light fell upon him, and he looked up to see Ellen in the doorway, and Anna with a lantern. In the same instant they came to him. So did young Tom, and between them they rolled the man gently over so that he lay on his back. They could see him better now, a stocky thick-set man in clogs and a frieze jacket, with blood still oozing from his scalp and forehead. It had covered his face and mouth, giving him a ghastly look of being much more hurt than he probably was, but Robert was staring hard as the lantern light fell on the face. He had recognized one of his own weavers.

'What's all this?' asked Nicholas.

'I should have thought you could see very well what it is,' said Ellen. 'It's what comes of turning everything upside down, and nobody knowing his place on a Sunday evening. How can anyone know his place? There used to be folk with carriages and folk who walked, and we all knew where we were, but now they all go whizzing in a cloud of steam and you can't tell which is which. You'd better go for Mr. Buck.'

'Why on earth should we want Buck?'

'If you can get the steam out of your head for a moment you might remember he's a surgeon. We can't see to this by ourselves, can we? Now, Robert, you take his shoulders. Tom, can you manage his feet?'

'Ellen! You don't intend--'

'Of course I do. We always used to help a man who was hurt, and we're going to do it now. Go and fetch Mr. Buck.'

'All right.' The easy good-natured tone had come back to him now. 'Robert, what have you done with that pistol?'

'It's in my pocket.'

'Well, if I were you I'd let the hammer down. I don't want to pay Buck twice.'

He went off without another word to find the surgeon, while the rest of them laboured to get the wounded man indoors. They sponged the blood from his face while they waited, and Robert knew that his guess was right. This was Jack Holt, a weaver at Victoria mill; but he had not, before, been known as a Chartist.

Nicholas returned with the portly surgeon, who took a half-hour at his work before he announced that the man had come to no great harm but had better stay where he was for the night. Nicholas stifled a yawn, and Robert thought he had better take that as a hint. He glanced at the clock and saw that it was all but midnight, more than time for him to go.

They left it to Anna to see him away, and she stood with him for a moment in the hall before they opened the door.

'It's been a dreadful day,' she said. 'Let's hope Monday's better.'

'It's almost Monday now. But at least we shan't have Benbow in the afternoon.'

'Nor fighting at night, I hope.' She glanced suddenly up the silent stair. 'You know, Ellen's right about everything upside down. I know she can sound pretty silly, but she has a way of fastening on what matters. Anyway, I'm with her about having Nick out at night with a hunting crop. Or you, either.'

'I think we had to.'

'Isn't that what's wrong?' She looked suddenly up at him in the candle-light, and she seemed to move closer. 'It might have been you, tonight, hurt like that. I've been thinking of it all the time.'

^{&#}x27;Anna!'

'Oh, I know. But so has Ellen, for Nick. Do you know what it's been like for us, today?'

He looked down at her, groping for an answer and finding himself tongue-tied and without one. Instead he had her suddenly in his arms, pulling her fiercely and protectively close, then drawing her up as his lips met hers. Very slowly he lifted his head again, and he found that he was smiling.

'It's all right,' he told her. 'There's no harm done, and we're

all safe.'

'I know.' A smile that seemed relief had come to her now. 'I'm sorry. I shouldn't be so silly.'

'It isn't silly. But we're all safe, all of us.'

'I don't want you to go away like this. I don't know what will happen to you.'

'I never do like going. Anna, when will you marry me?'

'Marry?'

She jerked her head back in surprise at a word she had not expected, but a sudden blaze of confidence was in him, and he pressed it firmly.

'There's no surprise at all,' he said. 'You've known for months past that I——'

'You haven't said that before.'

'I know I haven't, but that doesn't matter. When will you marry me?'

'Oughtn't you to ask if I will?'

'No.'

She had pushed her head further back, taking her poise again, and this blunt answer seemed to disconcert her. Her mouth opened and then shut again, as if she were having to change her mind. Then, perhaps to her relief, there were sounds of movement above. A door opened, and Ellen's voice was heard, insisting that Tom and Susie be off to bed at once. Anna seized the diversion promptly.

'It's midnight,' she whispered.

'But when will you marry me?'

'I'll think about it.'

'That's no answer.'

'It's one that nobody else would have had.'

'But, Anna---'

'It really is too late.' She had glanced up the stair again, and Nicholas could be heard as he locked the parlour, where the

windows were smashed and the glass still on the floor. 'It's Monday already.'

'Yes.' He nodded, knowing that he could do no more just

now. 'But you will tell me?'

'Some day.' She nodded in her turn, and he thought an eyebrow was beginning to lift. 'I'm not sure how Sally Briggs looks after you, and I may have to take you in hand. I'm used to looking after. Now good night!'

'Good night, my dear.'

He kissed her again, regardless of whether Nicholas came down the stair or not, and she seemed to have no thought of it either. Then she pulled the door half open for him.

'Good night,' she whispered. 'You'll know it's Monday

morning soon.'

'But you'll think?'

'There's no harm in thinking. Good night!'

It was Monday morning, certainly, when he woke, and he was tired and sleepy, but the rattle of clogs in the street soon brought him to practical thoughts again. He let himself out of the house as the whistles blew, and he was half-way down Colne Lane before he became aware that things were not quite as usual. He was within a few yards now of the mill, and he should have been hearing the puff of the engine and the groan of shafting. Instead there was a silence, broken only by a roar of escaping steam, loud enough to say that safety-valves were lifting to the limit. It was almost what had been heard at Vivary Bridge last Friday, and Robert covered those last few yards at a run.

He plunged headlong through the door, and in the mill he found confusion. Not a loom was moving, and work in Joe's iron-shop had not begun. Joe was with Jack Tattersall, the engine-tenter, and two of his ironworkers, and they seemed to be concerned with the main shaft that ran upwards from the engine house to the upper storey. Harris was standing with them, and his sharp observant looks made him seem more of a policeman than a doorkeeper. All of them looked perturbed, and Joe had the flush of colour that told of anger too.

The tale came out at once. Tattersall had come with his stoker at something before six, and by seven o'clock they had been ready with a full head of steam and the safety valves just lifting. Prompt to the moment Tattersall had swung the regulator over for the twelve-hour day. A moment later, as the

piston began sliding in and out, he had stood rigid in alarm as noises that frightened him came from the shafting. He had listened for a few short seconds, and then, with a promptness that would have done credit to a far more seasoned tenter, he had slammed the regulator shut and brought the whole mill to a grinding halt. Jack o' Dicks, as Joe remarked later, had a head on his shoulders.

They had been looking for the trouble when Robert came hurrying in, and already they were suspecting what it was. In a few minutes more they had it beyond doubt. The thick iron shafting was supported, in the usual way, by hand-forged iron collars that encircled it at convenient points and served also as the bearings in which it could turn. During the week-end someone had poured sand into all the bearings; and already, from the few revolutions it had made, the shaft looked deeply scored. Another five minutes would have meant a major repair, with the mill stopped for a month or more.

Joe took firm charge, pleased that he could himself be the directing genius. He peered critically at the bearings and then announced that it was a damned nuisance but nothing more than that. They could wash this out, he said, and he soon had them coupling a canvas hosepipe to a pump by the well. Half a dozen weavers were set to work the pump, and soon the jet from the hose was swirling through the loosely fitting collars, washing out the sand and a good deal more besides. They moved steadily from bearing to bearing, and behind them came men with oil and pots of tallow. In an hour and a half they had done it all, and Jack o' Dicks gave the steam again. The shafting rumbled, the looms began their clatter, and Joe went out for a pint.

He came back looking as if he had had about three, and he was very jovial when Robert cornered him in the office and tried to discuss who had broken in, and how. Joe said he didn't know. He no longer set the spring guns now they had a doorman, and Robert had better ask Bill Harris. The fellow was supposed to be a policeman, so he ought to know something about breaking in.

Harris was promptly called, and as soon as he heard what the matter was his manner changed. He glanced round to be sure that the door was tightly closed. Then he seated himself at the table, and he had a way now that might have caused surprise in the Admiral Rodney. 'I wanted to have a word with you,' he said quietly. 'Can

you tell me anything about Dick Hindle?'

Robert sat silent, wondering what this was about. He had never heard of Dick Hindle, but Joe evidently had. He was looking surprised, but he made no difficulty about answering.

'He was a locksmith,' he said. 'Knew his trade, too.'

'Did he work for you?'

'Till we had a bit of trouble.'

'What was that, please?'

'Doors being opened when they shouldn't. That sort of thing. They were making pikes in here at week-ends, and I had to put spring guns down to keep 'em out. Then we came in here one Sunday, and they messed the guns about to catch me. So that was the finish. I changed the locks next day, and I was rid of both my locksmiths. I went right out of that trade.'

'Probably wise of you.' Harris nodded thoughtfully. 'But

you mean that Hindle was turned off?'

'I do, and he's staying off. I'm having no more men in here who can pick locks. But what's this to do with sand in the collars? Are you saying it was Dick Hindle?'

'I don't know. But I don't think he's found another job yet. The other man you turned off seems to have a job in Burnley, but Hindle's been walking about the streets here ever since.'

'I can't help that.'

'No-o.' Harris sounded a little doubtful. 'Did you ever think he was a Chartist?'

'I don't know who's Chartist and who isn't. Is he one?'

'When Benbow was here last Wednesday night, there were half a dozen men who took him to the Admiral Rodney for a drink, Hindle was one of them.'

'Oh?' Joe's head reared angrily. 'Well, if I come across Dick Hindle——'

'You'll please leave him alone, Mr. Hoyle,' Harris interrupted with a sudden firmness. 'He's my affair now, and I do not want him to know that anyone's interested in him.'

'Just as you like. But if that man's been putting sand in our——'

'I didn't say he'd been putting sand. I don't really think he has. But think of it this way. Benbow is here on Wednesday, obviously to stir up trouble. Hindle and some others meet him, and perhaps they get their orders. On Friday there's that trouble at Mr. Thornber's mill, when the boilers nearly blew. Now

there's this sand affair here, and they're both of them the sort of thing an engine-tenter might think of, not a locksmith.

'Hey! Do you mean Jack o' Dick's?'

'No, I don't.' Harris spoke quickly now. 'I think he's perfectly all right. I just mean anybody who's used to engines. But as for Hindle, I fancy he's been opening locks to let other men go in.'

'Do you mean-' Robert leaned forward suddenly. 'Do

you mean just this week?'

'Probably for some time past.'

'Fettlers' shops, where they were making pikes?'

'I expect so.'

'And this sand affair here?'

'I don't know who did it, but I'm guessing that Hindle let him in. I know you changed the lock, Mr. Hoyle, but I suppose Hindle could open the new one, if he tried to.'

'Ave, I think he could, though he'd have found it easier, you

know, when he was working inside.'

'Suppose he had a friend who worked inside?'

'Aye, there's ways in which a man inside could help.'

'Just so.' Harris sounded as if he knew all about it. 'Did you know that Hindle has a brother-in-law who works here?'

'Hey?'

'One of the weavers. He's not here this morning, and they're saying he was hurt last night. He's Jack Holt.'

38.

THE AMBUSH

THAT took Robert once again to Harry Bolton's office on a Monday morning, where Wood and Foulds were again in anxious consultation. They looked grave when he told them of the attempt to cripple Victoria mill with sand, but they cut

him short when he tried to tell them of Hindle and Jack Holt. They had already heard of this from Harris, and Wood was able to add another detail.

'Hindle's disappeared,' he said. 'He hasn't been seen since Wednesday, when he was with Benbow in the Rodney. But what about this other man, Holt, when he's fit for work again? Do you take him back?'

'I can't see how we can, if he's a Chartist. It's asking for trouble.'

'All the same, I'd like you to do it. He might lead us back to Hindle, you see. And if you turn him off, he may just disappear.'

'Very well, I'll have to trust Harris to watch him. What

comes next?'

'I've a report that we're to expect Benbow again on Sunday week, to make another speech, That's from Harris, so it's probably true.'

'I expect he had it from Cooper.'

'Oh?' The magistrate was suddenly sharp. 'What do you know of Cooper?'

'Doesn't the whole town know of Cooper? He's the Chartists' general agent, isn't he?'

'Unless, of course, he's Benbow's.'

'Can nothing be done with Benbow?'

'I hope so.' The sharp tone returned suddenly. After what he said yesterday we've issued a Warrant for him, and if he does come back next week I hope we'll be ready for him.'

What that meant was soon known to the whole town. On the Wednesday printed notices appeared, listing the names of no less than five hundred men who were now to be impressed as Special Constables; which, with those already sworn, made an imposing total. There was a general belief that some of the Chartists had been much discouraged by their rough handling on Sunday night, and that their real strength might now be less than four hundred. This was denied by Sam Cooper, who declared that the Chartist strength was growing fast. He talked about the way the Specials had slunk from the Field last Sunday, and he maintained that the new lot would do something more than slink. All of them, he pointed out, were pressed men, and they would change sides when the true test came. It was bravely said, but not everybody took Cooper seriously. He was paid to talk like that, they said, and it might be a

different tale when the Specials out-numbered the Chartists by two to one, as Wood evidently meant them to.

Through the week the enrolment went on. Every one of the five hundred had to be sworn before he could have his truncheon and his armband, and it was Wednesday of the following week before all was done and the new force ready. The town was impressed by the magistrates' determination; and Wood, for his part, seemed decently satisfied, though he admitted that the whole of his six hundred and fifty would be of less use than one half-company of disciplined infantry from Burnley. But at least his Specials could be had at a moment's notice; which the infantry could not.

The day that saw the swearing-in completed saw the starting again of work at Vivary Bridge, with the boilers now passed as safe. The spinners and weavers there, who had been reduced almost to boiled nettles again while they waited, went back to their work with a gladness that nobody tried to hide, but what caused surprise was the behaviour of Tom Thornber. He had shown all his expected energy over calling in the experts to see to his boilers, and he had more or less stood over them as they worked, cursing and exhorting in his efforts to drive the work along. He had shown the same impatience over the other things. He had flatly refused to have the new regulator levers made by the engine-builders, insisting that the work should be done locally where he could keep an eye on it. This meant Joe, who had the only workshop equipped for this sort of thing, and it then turned out that Tom's notion of keeping an eye on things was to come stamping into Colne Lane twice a day to tell the iron men how to do it. Joe ended by telling him to go to hell, and it was Nicholas who had to make the peace between them. It could therefore have been supposed that Tom, as soon as his machinery was turning, would give his whole energies to establishing a smooth routine again. What in fact he did was to go to Manchester. He was at the mill when it opened at seven o'clock that Wednesday morning, and he saw to it that the boilers were at full pressure and that every loom and throstle was working. Then he disappeared, and he was next seen going up Spring Lane with a man walking behind him to carry his bag. He climbed into the Tradesman coach, and away he went. The mill could apparently run itself.

That was at ten o'clock, when Joe was coming out of the Hole i' th' Wall after having his pint. He saw Tom walking

up the street, followed by the man with the bag, and at once he went pushing across for a word with him.

He was half amused and half suspicious when he told Robert

about it a quarter of an hour later.

'Tom's getting worse,' he said. 'I don't mind him in a temper now and then, but he's been that way for days.'

'Did you upset him?'

'He didn't need upsetting. I just asked him what he was going to Manchester for, and he told me what I could go and do.'

'You're sure he has gone to Manchester?'

'Well, he climbed into the coach, and there was a chap putting his bag in the back.'

'He must have business there.'

'He hasn't gone off like this before, just when he might expect trouble at his mill.'

'It's his own affair, I suppose. I don't think I'd worry about it.'

Robert was not much interested, and he had every intention of forgetting it. But he heard some more about it when he went across to Cumberland House that evening. Ellen was so full of it that she could talk of nothing else, and since she was Tom's sister she saw it in a different way.

'Tom's impossible,' she declared. 'Our mother used to say he was born two months short and he never made it up. How Ann puts up with him I don't know, and what we're going to do if she won't any longer I can't even think.'

Ellen went plunging on. She and Anna had thought fit to walk down to Vivary Bridge to congratulate Tom on the reopening of the mill. They had, of course, found no Tom, but

they had certainly found Ann.

'Of course it's hard to make out what Ann does mean,' said Ellen. 'When she once starts talking she goes on and on, and you can't stop her. Not that she hasn't had something to put up with, but of course Ann's there to look after him and Father, and someone has to. It's this letter that seems to have done it.'

'What letter?'

'I was telling you about it. I---'

'No, Ellen.' Anna intervened suddenly to Robert's rescue. 'You haven't mentioned the letter. But what Ellen means is that

Tom was bad enough all last week, and then, on Monday, he had a letter.'

'And there's no reason why he shouldn't. But we haven't met her yet, any of us, and we don't know anything about her except that she's fat, or what he's doing with her. He never could look after himself.'

'But do you mean---'

'Ruth Ratcliffe,' said Anna calmly. 'We've vaguely heard of her, and John saw him with her. Ann says she knew the writing on the letter.'

'He's been having letters from her every week,' said Ellen. 'That's what Ann says, and she ought to know. But she says this was a longer letter than he's ever had before, and when he'd read it he kicked the cat.'

'He was so angry,' said Anna, 'that he missed the cat and hurt his toe. I wish I'd seen him.'

'Oh no, you wouldn't, if you'd been there. Ann says she thought he was going to kick *her*, and if there's any more of Ruth Ratcliffe she'll walk out.'

'But what is expected, please?'

'How do we know? But Ann has it in her head that he'll end by marrying this Ruth. I don't know why, but that's what she says, and when Ann has a thing in her head you can't move it. She's like that.'

'It doesn't sound as if she can really know much about it.'

'And in any case,' said Anna, 'Ruth Ratcliffe may be very sweet. There's no reason for Ann to say she's horrid.'

'Well, if you think you can argue with Ann, you'd better try doing it.'

But Nicholas returned at that moment. He had been impressed into the command of a group of Special Constables, and he had been with them through the evening, putting them through some rudimentary instruction. Now he came clumping in, tired and thirsty, to rid himself of truncheon and armband and pour himself a brandy. He then told them that the Chartists had had a bellman out, crying the news that Benbow would speak again on Colne Field, this coming Sunday afternoon at two o'clock.

'Don't they know there's a Warrant for him?' asked Robert. 'They can't miss guessing it, even if they don't know it. All the same, I don't think Benbow can be a perfect fool. He can't be sure that a company of soldiers won't be called out, and he

knows very well that his friends won't keep them back. So he'll have an escape ready. Somebody like Hindle will see to that. Some local man.'

It seemed likely enough. Dick Hindle was still missing, but his brother-in-law, Jack Holt, had at last recovered from his bang on the head. He turned up at Victoria mill next morning, obviously wondering whether his absence had cost him his job. He inquired hopefully of the doorkeeper, and Harris promptly sent him to Robert, who took the chance to have a talk with the man.

It did not go quite as he expected. Holt wished to be at work again, and he made no secret of what it would mean to him to lose his job. But he did no shuffling. He admitted outright that he was a Chartist, but he would nevertheless do honest work as a weaver if he were allowed to. It was not his duty as a Chartist, he said, to be a bad workman. Robert asked him whether he thought it his duty as a Chartist to roam the streets on a Sunday night, flinging stones through windows, and battering at doors with a gatepost; and Holt looked him in the eve and said that it had been the beer. They had all had a pint too much, and they had not understood whose house it was. The meaning seemed to be that they would not have picked on Old Nick's house if they had not been fuddled, and Robert was pleased by that. So he sent Holt back to work, and it was not until that was settled that the man came out with something else. He spoke some quick thanks for being cared for after his hurt, and he looked as if he meant it. Then he disappeared to the looms; and Robert mentioned this talk to Sergeant Harris. who made no difficulty about thinking that Holt was a decent man. It took all sorts, he said, to make Chartists, Robert agreed. and remembered that the stones had come through the windows in spite of that. He was wondering what would happen this coming Sunday when Benbow made his second speech.

Wood had made his plans for it with care, and his first shrewd stroke was to see plainly that his six hundred and fifty Special Constables could not be expected to act together as one unit. They had neither the training nor the discipline, and they would do much better if they worked in small parties, each led by a man they knew. These leaders would have to be the professional men and the cotton men, with a few of the shop-keepers and craftsmen, and not many of them looked fitted for more than a small command. Wood therefore divided his force

into fifty groups, each of only twelve men and a leader, and he was hard put to it to find the fifty leaders. Some of them looked far from happy, but he thought it reasonably sure that not all of them would fail him.

His second good stroke was to see that his object was to arrest William Benbow, not to fight a pitched battle with Chartists; and if Benbow could be secured before he had a chance to speak, that would be all to the good. Nobody knew how he would arrive, but on the last occasion he had come on a hired horse to the Red Lion. If he should be so imprudent as to do that again there might be a chance of taking him at

the outset, and Wood decided to lay an ambush.

He prepared it carefully. He would have no display of force to frighten anybody off, and for the same reason he would have no activity at Bolton's office, which was adjacent to the Red Lion. He therefore fixed his own headquarters in the Angel, farther along the street and conveniently out of sight, and here he had one of his parties of twelve, commanded, to some people's surprise, by Bill Harris, a mere doorkeeper. Just below the Red Lion a narrow lane led off from the street, and down here was another party of twelve, commanded by Tom Thornber. A little farther along was the alley in which Robert Spencer had his cooper's vard, and here was a third party, hidden in the yard and commanded by Spencer himself. He had perhaps been chosen for his close knowledge of the area, and the men in the party were all his near neighbours. A further hundred yards away came Windy Bank with Colne Lane opposite, and here were two more parties, the one in Windy Bank under Joe Hoyle, and the one in Colne Lane under Robert Shaw, both of them chosen because they knew the neighbourhood. All these were in their places by one o'clock. The remaining Special Constables, all six hundred of them, were on the Field, under the orders of Foulds, the other magistrate. They had marched up there in a body, with orders to create, if they could, the impression that they were the entire force.

There was thus a very pretty ambush round the Red Lion, and Benbow would have been wiser if he had entered the town by some other route. The local Chartists had perhaps been a little too sure that the clash would come only when he began to speak. They had sent no warning to him, and he rode right into the trap. By a quarter past one their reception party had gathered at the Red Lion, the half-dozen men who were the

local leaders, and a squad of burly upright men with clubs, who were the bodyguard. A man who had been strolling idly down the street promptly retraced his steps and took the news to the Angel. Then at half past one, Benbow came riding up the street, openly and confidently. He dismounted where his friends stood waiting; and a man who had been sitting over a pint in the Red Lion came quickly out and turned into the lane which hid Tom Thornber and his men.

Tom reacted as could have been expected. He had returned from Manchester the previous afternoon, quite as ill-humoured as before. He had now been required by the magistrates to leave his Sunday dinner when he had hardly begun it, and to spend his afternoon waiting about in a yard for the purpose of arresting a Chartist. He was itching to take it out of somebody, and Benbow would do as well as anybody. So Tom did not hesitate. The fact that he and his dozen men would be facing nearly twenty Chartists had no effect on him at all. He led out of the yard at once; and his men, who had been chosen for being as reckless as himself, promptly followed. They rounded the corner of the lane and hurled themselves at the Benbow.

The result was pandemonium. The Chartist bodyguard had been carefully chosen too, and they were as bellicose as the Constables. There was one gasp of surprise, and then they whirled their clubs round their heads and flung themselves into a general mêlée. If they had been a second or two earlier they would probably have had their man away at once, but they were just too late. Tom had ignored the bodyguard and plunged straight at Benbow, who had leaped back against the wall for safety, and was now ringed by Specials. They had put their backs to him while they faced the counter-attack, but he was still within the ring, and the Chartists would have to break it to get him out; and that, by the way Tom and his men were fighting, would not be a matter of a moment. The odds were with the Chartists, but time was running out.

The din from this affray was enough to rouse any neighbourhood, and Spencer and his men, in the yard down below the alley, could hardly ignore it. They heard the stamping and shouting and the clattering of clubs, and they looked at each other unhappily. Spencer was a peaceful man, with no pretence of liking this sort of thing, but he was not without courage and he was not going to have anyone say that he was. So he spat on his hand, grasped his truncheon firmly, and led out of the yard. His men, pushed by much the same feelings as himself, went with him; and a few seconds later they were attacking the Chartist flank. It had not the ferocity of Tom's wild rush, but it occupied some of the Chartists and took away their advantage in numbers.

A hundred yards away, down in Windy Bank, the noise of battle came clearly to Joe Hoyle, who was by, this time bored and disgruntled. He went to the corner and looked up the street, and that left him in no doubt that it was time to go to Tom's help. He turned to wave an urgent summons to Robert, who was standing by the open door of Victoria mill, and then he went pounding up the street, his twelve men with him, to rescue Tom. He paid no attention to stragglers from the fight. Nor did his men; and all that is certain is that when they had covered less than half the distance their view was cut by a wave of smoke that came swirling from the alley. In a few seconds more they could see men running in the smoke, making for the alley. First were three Chartists and then Spencer and his men, and Joe promptly changed course and made for the alley, joining in what he thought was a pursuit.

His guess was nearly right. The smoke, pouring out of the alley with a pungent scent of burning, had been carried by the wind to the stamping shouting men in the mêlée, and had so surprised and startled them that there had been a momentary pause in the fighting. This was a chance for Benbow, and he had taken it with the speed and calm of a veteran. He had hurled himself suddenly at the ring that hemmed him in, bursting between two of them by sheer weight of impact and then running with all his speed to where the smoke was thickest. That meant the alley. Two burly Chartists, quicker in thought than the rest followed him on the instant, and all three of them had reached the alley before anyone tried to stop them.

It was not entirely his duty as a Special Constable that made Spencer the first on their heels. He had recognized instantly the pungency in that scent of burning, and he was making hot-foot for his own yard, where his kegs and casks were stored. He gave no thought to the Chartists who had run in front of him, and he did not even notice where they went. What took his eye was the cloud of smoke from the yard, and he could hear the crackle of the fire as he put his shoulder to the gate. He had now only one thought left, and the rest of his party had taken the alarm as thoroughly as he. They were all his neigh-

bours, and they knew very well that if one of these congested houses took fire it would ignite some others. They swarmed into the vard after him, and they were quickly followed by Joe and his men, all shouting fiercely and brandishing clubs, under the impression that they were pursuing Chartists. Two of Spencer's men were cracked on the head with clubs before this had been sorted out, and the language in the ensuing exchanges was said afterwards to have been as lurid as the fire. Robert's party, pounding along half a minute later in support of Joe, found the alley empty, no Chartists anywhere, and two parties of Special Constables kicking at a heap of blazing casks. Nobody ever learned the exact truth of what had been done, but there could be no doubt that one of the Chartists in the original mêlée had done some cool clear thinking. No one, in the shouting confusion, would have noticed his going, and in the yard he would have found everything ready. The barrels, dry and seasoned, were impregnated, some with brandy and some with wine, all of them ready to flare quickly in a thick and pungent smoke. There were shavings in plenty in the yard, and a man with a few of the new phosphorous matches in his pocket would have had no trouble at all. There was even a steady wind, blowing in the right direction. It was as simple as that, and as a diversion it had succeeded brilliantly. Benbow was safe away, and no one had even noticed where he had gone.

This, therefore, was the situation presented to William Wood when he arrived a minute or two later with Harris and the fifth party of Constables. The men on the spot had let Benbow slip through their fingers, together with his hottest supporters, and there was now no saying where he was. But Wood proved to be a leader. He accepted the news easily. He quickly asked whether anyone was badly hurt, and he expressed himself warmly about the zeal and courage of everybody. Then he conferred with Harris, who was now behaving more and more like a second-in-command and less and less like a doorkeeper, and they soon decided that Benbow must still be in the town. He might head for the Field, to keep faith with the crowd waiting there, but this seemed less likely than a prudent lying low. His supporters would certainly have some sort of hiding place for him, but there was no hint of where it might be.

Wood turned aside to call for Benbow's horse, on which he sent a man riding to the Field to warn Foulds of the possibilities and to ask for another hundred men to be sent at once to

the Red Lion. Then he had a quick consultation with Harris, and soon a cordon had been placed round the possible area. Eight more parties of Specials, the hundred men that Wood had asked for, came tramping down from the Field, and then the work began of searching houses known to belong to Chartists; and Wood and Harris seemed to have a surprising knowledge of which these were. They might have succeeded, and Benbow been taken, if Joe Hoyle had not been impulsive. Yet he came within an inch of triumph.

Joe and his men had been sent back to their station in Windy Bank, with the difference that they were now to patrol rather than stay hidden, and they found it tedious. Windy Bank was no salubrious place. It was a steeply sloping street, store-sheds, slaughter-houses, and dandy shops, with a huddle of old insanitary houses, many of them in alleys that ran away to the east. Most of the inhabitants must have been on the Field this afternoon, and Windy Bank was dusty and quiet, made no more pleasant by a scent from the slaughter-houses. Nothing moved anywhere, the search for Benbow seemed far away, and all of Joe's men could think of better ways of spending a Sunday afternoon than this. Joe was as bored as any of them, and he began to wonder if he could nip in somewhere for a pint. He brooded on this for a while, and then he compromised by sending two of his men to the Jovial Hatters to have a pint each and bring one back for him. He pacified the rest of his force by promising that they should all have their turns, two by two. After their exertions at fire-fighting they were as dry as Joe.

Then it happened. Joe was at the bottom of the street wondering gloomily how long those two would be at fetching his beer, when a door in one of the buildings was opened and a man peeped out. Joe was exactly opposite the door, and he and the man looked straight into each other's eyes from a distance of perhaps five yards. The man disappeared, and the door was slammed hurriedly shut. Joe stood gaping while two facts pushed themselves into his head. First, this building was Joe Halstead's dandy shop, which the Chartists had known how to enter when they wanted it for pike drill. Second, the man who had just peeped out was Sam Cooper, the tapster of the Admiral Rodney. Joe had never been slow in the wits, and it did not take him long to guess which building the Chartists were now using as a hide for Benbow.

Joe was not, at that moment, well placed for attack. He had

two of his men away, and the remaining ten were scattered up and down the street. Only two of them were close at hand, and he might have done better if he had waited to concentrate his force. But that was not Joe's way, and he could already see himself leading a triumphant march to the magistrates. He gave a great bellow of a shout to summon all his men. Then he heaved his truncheon and leaped at the door.

It was not even locked. Sam Cooper had not so much as turned the key when he slammed it shut, and Joe went plunging into the dandy shop, with two of his men following. Six men were in the shop, and one of them was Dick Hindle, the locksmith. Another was Benbow. Near to him was Sam Cooper, and Joe wasted no time in looking at the others. He hurled himself through the group, and he lost his truncheon in the process. He ignored that, plunged straight on, and dived at what he thought was Benbow.

A dandy shop had to be well lighted, and the looms were placed between the many windows. Benbow was jumping between two looms to get at a window, when Cooper seemed to lose his head. He jumped also, and he got there first. He cannoned into Benbow, knocking him aside; and Joe, who had leaped at Benbow, collared Cooper instead. He jumped on his shoulders, bringing him to the floor with a bang, and then he held him down till help should come. In the wild confusion of the moment he did not notice that he had the wrong man, and for the next few seconds he had enough to think about. The men he had hurled aside were quick to recover, and one of them leaped on Joe, as he struggled to hold the writhing Cooper. His own two men were embroiled with the others. and for some few moments it was a wild free-for-all, with nobody knowing what anyone else was doing. Then more of Joe's men came, and in another minute the affair was over. These were the Chartist leaders, not the picked fighters of the bodyguard, and they were quickly secured. Joe scrambled to his feet, panting and dishevelled, after seeing at last that he had been holding Cooper. He looked quickly round to see who was holding Benbow, and an open window told him the answer. Below, in the valley, ran the stream that passed by Vivary Bridge, but he did not need to look so far. Scarcely a hundred yards away, on the sloping grass, two men were holding a straddled horse, and Benbow was at that instant mounting it. He settled himself in the saddle, waved a derisory farewell.

and rode away. The men who had held the horse went running towards the stream, and all that Joe could do was to send a man in haste to William Wood.

Wood was in the dandy shop within ten minutes, and, rather to Joe's surprise, he was pleased. He said so, and Joe was thanked in front of everyone for a courageous attempt. He had expected to be blamed for losing Benbow, but there was no word about that. So Joe beamed at everyone and said he always did his best and he couldn't do more. Wood said again that he was pleased, and he was probably sincere in that. The truth was that he cared very little whether Benbow was in iail or not, as long as he was not in Colne. Benbow, in custody. would have been a responsibility, raising a distinct chance of a full-scale riot by the Chartists to rescue him, and from Wood's point of view he was much better away. The town was still quiet, and already the disappointed crowd were streaming away from the Field in hundreds, unlikely to make more trouble. Wood had every reason to be satisfied, and he quickly said that the parties who had been involved in all this might now go off duty.

Joe, still very genial after being complimented by the magistrate, asked Robert to go home with him for tea with Jane, and they walked together down a street that was beginning to fill with people. It was plain that tea was now the word with most folk. Then a man halted in their path, and it was Jack Holt, the weaver who had been allowed to have his job back. He looked nervous, and he glanced back over his shoulder as if to see if anyone were watching. He spoke quickly

to Robert.

'You were in t'mill this afternoon, weren't you, wi' them Specials?'

'I was.'

'Did you lock the door when you come away?'

'What's that?'

Robert was startled, and an unpleasant feeling grew within him that he had not locked the door. His orders had been to keep his men out of sight, and for that reason he had opened the main door of the mill and kept them just inside it. He had been standing in the doorway when he saw Joe's urgent wave for help, and he had at once led his own party up in support; and now, thinking back to it, he felt more and more certain that he had not stayed to lock the door. It had been a moment

for haste, and he could not remember that he had even thought about the door.

'I thought you mightn't.' Again Holt glanced over his shoulder, and then he turned sharply again to Robert. 'There might be some that's seen it.'

He slipped away suddenly, almost running along the street in his wish to be clear, and at Robert's side there was a rumble from Ioe

'What the heck?' he said. 'Have you left the dam' place open?'

'I'm not sure. I----'

'Come on!'

Joe set off at a run, with Robert after him.

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TWO IN TROUBLE

THERE was no sign of trouble as they looked down Colne Lane. The mill seemed quiet and deserted, and there was no noise to hint of men inside. Here and there, on the steep slope to Waterside, men were walking up or down, but they seemed to be peaceably on their own occasions. Hard by the mill, looking as if they were inspecting the Inghamite Chapel, was a party of Special Constables, whose leader could be recognized as Frank Anderton of the Hole i' th' Wall.

'What's wrong?' he called to Joe.

'Anyone been down here?'

'Looks like it.'

He pointed to the hard plain face of the chapel, where two broken windows showed jagged teeth of glass, the mark of the flying stones, and Joe nodded grimly. 'I meant my place,' he said.

Anderton said nothing, but he was at Robert's side as Joe tried the door. It was not locked, and the three of them rushed in, only to check at once. A thin haze of smoke seemed to be everywhere, and the reek of burning bit at their throats and nostrils. Joe ran to the nearest door, and tugged at the latch. It stayed shut, plainly as securely locked as it should have been, and Joe moved to the next, as Anderton's men came crowding in.

At the top of the stair was a small store room, a place for mops and brushes, which had been used of late for scrap from the looms as well. Joe pushed the door open, and the smoke came swirling in a cloud that overwhelmed them, setting them coughing and spluttering. Inside the room they could see a dull glow come to life as the opened door let the air go in. The smoke thinned a little as it spread, and one of Anderton's men, full of the best intentions, swung his truncheon and smashed a window to let the smoke escape.

'You damned fool!' said Joe.

He was right. Below them the main door was still open, and there was now a through draught. The glow in the store room brightened ominously. There was a thud, a puff of smoke and a flicker of flame, and an instant later the store room was ablaze. The men jumped back before the menace of it, and nobody but Joe had coolness enough to try to shut the door. But it opened inwards, with the flame sweeping round it now, and he could not reach it.

'Damned fool!' he said again as he retreated. 'Come on. Let's have the buckets.'

Joe at least knew what he wanted. He was pulling out his keys while somebody shut the dangerous outer door, and then he was opening door after door to find the firebuckets, which were ready filled with water. It was not a big enough fire to withstand that treatment, and little by little, as the flames sank down into steam and smoke, they could see what had happened. Someone had stacked together the mops and brushes, some cleaning rags and the pile of scrap cloth, and had emptied a pot of tallow over all. One good match would then have been enough. Unfortunately one wall of the store room was a wooden partition, and the fire had been lighted against this. The old dry boards had ignited, and the strengthened fire

had burst into the adjoining room, which was also a store, but a very different one. This was a room carefully locked, in which the whole week's output of the looms had been stacked on Saturday, ready to go to Manchester on Monday, and there was not a yard of it left that was now fit for any sort of market. Some had been burned, some merely scorched, but the whole of it was drenched with water and soaked with soot and ash. Robert looked at it in sickening dismay. Nothing they could ever do would make it fit for sale, and he knew, without referring to any note, that there were two hundred and seventy-one pieces, each of a hundred yards. He also knew that their insurance, which had been taken only since the troubles started, specifically excluded damage caused by Chartists or any other rioters. It was utter loss, lessened only by its value as rags for the engine tenter.

They stamped on the ashes to make doubly sure, and then they trooped out in silence. Joe locked the door with a vicious show of care, and then, as Anderton and his men moved off, he turned to Robert.

'I suppose you know a dead loss when you see one?'

'I'm afraid I know this one.'

'I'm glad there's something you know.' It came with a snap, and in Joe's angriest tone. 'It makes me sick. So do you, and your dam' face.'

He turned on his heel, waiting for no answer even if Robert could have thought of one. But he could not. He stood speechless, dumbfounded by the rudeness of it, while Joe's boots clumped heavily on the cobbles as he climbed the slope. He reached the top, and turned towards the Hole i' th' Wall without ever looking round; and Robert stood in the evening sunlight, not moving, while the flush mounted in his cheeks.

He was still seething with anger, partly at Joe for those words, and partly at himself for his oversight with the door, when he went into Cumberland House some two hours later. Nicholas waved him lazily to a chair and offered him a drink. Robert refused rather curtly, and Anna looked at him sharply.

'What's the matter?' she said quietly.

He told them briefly, and for a moment Nicholas looked amused.

'Poor old Joe!' he said, 'Here's to him!'

He sipped his brandy with relish, and for the first time in his life Robert snapped at Nicholas.

'It isn't funny to me,' he said. 'Either what we've lost or

what Joe said.'

'How much is it?'

'Two hundred and seventy-one pieces. I don't know whether Joe can afford it or not, but I certainly can't. We're a young firm, and you know how I've strained to take my share in it.'

He found Anna suddenly at the side of his chair, with her

hand on his shoulder.

'You'll get past it,' she said quickly. 'We all have knocks at times, but they don't last for ever.'

'No, but----'

'You'll get past this one. Won't he, Nick?'

'If I'm any judge, he will.' His amusement had faded now, and he was looking gravely at Robert. 'How about insurance?'

'Riot and arson excluded.'

'Ye-es. Is the stuff no use for anything?'

'Engine rags.'

Anna was suddenly at his side again, with wine glinting red in a glass, and he sipped it obediently. Then he looked up into her eyes, and for the first time that evening his face eased.

'Thanks,' he said quietly. He sipped again, and then looked back to Nicholas. 'I'm sorry if I've made too much of it, but it's a loss greater than I can afford.'

'Even your share of it?'

'If it is a share. Joe will say it's mine entirely.'

'It doesn't matter what Joe says. You're in partnership, and a loss is half and half, or whatever your agreement says. Tell him so.'

'I feel I'm to blame, all the same.'

'Then start feeling differently. Do you think Joe's never left anything unlocked? Anna, pour me another drink.' He turned suddenly to Robert again. 'If you want to shut Joe up, ask him how he lost the petty cash. That was about three years ago, but he hasn't forgotten it.'

'What was it?' said Anna promptly.

'Joe at his best.' He sat back, watching her as she poured his brandy. 'Joe went out for a pint, and he didn't just leave his office unlocked. He left his whole bunch of keys in the lock as well.' 'Yes?' Anna's looks were matching his as she handed him his glass. 'What happened?'

'Nothing, just then. But a couple of days later he wanted the petty cash, and he keeps it in a box in a drawer. It looked all right, only it happened to be full of dirty nails, and you should have heard Joe about that. We thought he was having fits.'

'Did he lose a lot?'

'Nobody knows' Nicholas seemed to be enjoying his brandy now. 'Joe claimed on his insurance, and they sent him a nasty letter back, saying they didn't think anyone's petty cash had as much in it as he said. Joe was quite hurt.'

'But what happened?'

'They paid him about half what he asked for, and it's my belief he didn't lose. Joe's pretty sharp. Anyway——' He swung quickly back to Robert. 'If he starts saying too much, just remind him about the petty cash. And mind you, that was carelessness. He hadn't any Chartists with clubs to think about just then.'

'Even so, it's two hundred and seventy-one pieces, and how I'm to stand even my own part of that I don't know.'

'It's part of the general expenses, and you say Joe's advancing those for the time being. It's something you'll sort out in a year or two's time, when things are better. Let's see how they look tomorrow. It might be an interesting Monday.'

But Monday began quietly. Everyone went to work as if nothing had ever happened to spoil the quiet of Sunday. The clogs clattered down the streets, the whistles burst into steam at seven o'clock, the engines puffed and the water-wheels turned, exactly as on any other Monday, and at Harry Bolton's office the Justices held the discussion that was usual. Nor were they short of something to discuss. There were the five Chartists whom Joe had seized in the dandy shop. One of these was Dick Hindle who had been so foolish as to be taken with two bunches of keys in his pockets. He was set aside for a day or two while the keys were fitted to the doors of mills and fettlers' shops throughout the town, and then he was sent to Lancaster, for trial and transportation. Meanwhile the Justices had turned to the others who were taken with him. Three of them had taken part in the affray outside the Red Lion and Tom Thornber was sent for, to give evidence that they had resisted him and his Constables. But Tom was not to be found. The messenger came back with the news that he had again packed his bag and gone off to Manchester by the early coach, nobody knew why. So two members of his party had to make formal identification of the Chartists. That left Sam Cooper, who had been in the dandy shop, and there seemed to be no charge that could be brought against him. He had, in fact, been released the previous night, within an hour of his being taken, Wood declaring that merely to have been in Benbow's company was not an offence at law. So Sam Cooper was at large again, drawing pints in the Admiral Rodney, to the dissatisfaction of a good many people who thought the Justices had been oddly soft with him.

The Justices, however, were more concerned for Sergeant Harris, who could hardly pretend now to be no more than a doorkeeper. Too many folk had seen him at the Justices' side all that afternoon, suggesting and advising, and at times all but taking command, and already a score of men had stopped him in the street to ask who he really was. The secret, in short, was out, or as near out as mattered, and his usefulness as a secret agent had come to an end in Colne. But he had done his work. He had come to get evidence about the drilling and the forging of pikes, and Dick Hindle, whose keys had made those possible, was now secured. Benbow had been chased away. and this had been done without the sort of fighting in which the Chartists might have used their pikes. It was no small achievement, and much of it was due to Harris. Wood admitted this to Robert later in the day, when he warned him that he had now better look for another doorkeeper.

Robert was none too pleased. Harris had been an excellent doorkeeper, and he had been paid for the work by the Home Office. His successor would have to be paid by Shaw & Hoyle, and this was by no means a good moment for breaking it to Joe that an extra wage would have to be found. Joe was being difficult enough already, and if Robert had any hope that he would offer some amend for his rudeness he was soon disillusioned. Joe was as bad as before; and the result, with Robert sticking to his belief that the only way to deal with Joe was to stand up to him, was that they were now on very strained terms.

'I'm not dam' well having it,' had been Joe's opening. 'If

we've lost all that money, don't get thinking I'm paying it, because I'm not.'

'You pay your part of it. We share profits and we share losses.'

'Not when it's plain ruddy carelessness, we don't. Of all the dam' soft things to do, leaving the door unlocked!'

'How did you lose the petty cash that time?'

'What the hell do you know about it?'

'As much as most folk do. Old nails, wasn't it?'

'We're not talking about that. How do we get our money back?'

'I wish we could, but we'll never clean that cloth for any market.'

'Then we'll try the insurance.'

'It doesn't cover riot and arson.'

'It wasn't riot, was it? And we don't know that it's arson.'

'I don't see what else to call it.'

'You don't see a dam' thing, except how to lose money. Where's that chap, Holt?'

'Upstairs, at his loom.'

'He should be in jail, not at a loom.'

'What's wrong with you this morning? The man gave us warning, didn't he? I'd have thought we might have given him a word of thanks.'

'How did he know about it, anyway?'

'Well, I suppose, being a Chartist himself, he might-

'Aye, he might. And he might have done the dam' job himself.'

'I don't think for a moment that he did it.'

'It's not a matter of what you think. It's what a judge and jury's going to think. Hindle's brother-in-law, isn't he? Chucks stones? Right!'

'What do you mean?'

'Let's have him in here.'

There was no holding Joe back. Holt was called to the office, and Robert stood aside, frigid and disapproving, while Joe flung a storm of questions at the man. He mixed them with threats of jail and worse if he did not have the whole truth at once. But Holt stood firm. He said he thought he had shown goodwill by giving the warning. If he were sent to jail for supporting the Chartists, he could not help that. He would

not be the only one, and he had no intention of betraying anyone, either to Joe or the magistrate.

Joe was defeated. He had nothing to fall back on when his threats failed, and it ended in Holt's being sent back to his loom while Joe shouted noisily for Sergeant Harris and demanded immediate inquiries into the starting of that fire in the store room. Harris answered cautiously. The only hint he could offer was that Anderton and his party of Special Constables might remember having seen someone, if they were carefully questioned. But he was evidently not inclined to do the questioning himself, and Joe, who seemed by this time to be following some thought that eluded Robert altogether, crammed his hat on his head, and went off to the Hole i' th' Wall, partly, no doubt, for a pint, and partly to put some questions to Anderton. Robert was glad enough of his absence, and later that day he had a quiet word on his own with Jack Holt. He thanked the man outright for last night's warning, and went on to say plainly that he did not suspect him of having raised the fire himself. Holt responded at once to this different treatment, and he went on to tell what he said was the truth about the fire. He said he had been walking up from Waterside when a few men came out of the mill. They had known him to be a Chartist, and they had said with satisfaction that he might see something if he waited. They had then flung a few stones through the windows of the chapel opposite, after which they had trooped away, leaving him wondering what to do. At that point he had seen Anderton and his men coming down the lane, and at once, knowing that something was wrong in the mill, he had thought it safer to be off. A minute later he had seen Robert and Joe, and risked a word with them. That was all, except that he would not give the names of the men he had met.

Joe's inquiries, whatever they were, occupied him throughout the Tuesday, and so fully that he was hardly seen in the mill all day. He was out again on the Wednesday morning; and then, on Wednesday afternoon, he came rolling into the office, looking uncommonly pleased with himself. He was positively genial now, instead of being rude, and he carefully shut the office door before he would explain himself. He had the happy look of a man who has done his duty.

'Now,' he said in his richest tone, 'I've found what to do.

I've seen Frank, and every one o' those twelve chaps who were with him on Sunday.'

'As Specials? Yes?'

'You wouldn't believe what it cost in beer to get 'em talking. They just soak it up.'

'Well, what did they talk about?'

'I'm telling you. Those Specials came down this lane just a little before we did, and they saw a chap standing outside the mill.'

'That would be Holt.'

'How the hell do you know?'

'He told me.'

'What!' Joe stared blankly at him and then seemed to explode in annoyance. 'Couldn't you have told me? Here am I chasing all round the town to find things out, and you knew it all the time!'

'I didn't know you wanted it. And anyhow——' He was looking Joe hard in the eye now. 'You might remember some of the things you said the last time we talked. I thought you'd be better left alone for a bit after that.'

'You don't mean that you've taken offence like a little kid?'

'Suppose we come back to Holt?'

'Oh, all right.' Joe seemed to be struggling with his feelings, and then suddenly his face cleared, as if the sun were breaking through again. 'Maybe it's as well to have him both ways. He says it to you, and I can prove it from the others.'

'But what's the point of all this?'

'Ah!' Joe had a very knowing look now. 'Now what would a magistrate say? What would a jury say? Here's a mill that's set on fire. Here's a man who's a Chartist coming out of it at just that moment.'

'He wasn't coming out of it. He was just---'

'Oh, wasn't he?' There was a fine note of scorn in this. 'The mill's just been set on fire, and there's no one else about. The next thing is, he meets us, and he knows the mill's on fire. What's any judge going to say? The man's a Chartist, remember.'

'Well—' Robert found himself hesitating, knowing that he did not like this. 'You could make a case against him, if you put it that way, but what's the point of all this? It won't help us, will it, to hound Holt into jail?'

'I don't give a dam' whether he's in jail or not. All I care about is to put the fear of God in him, and then he'll remember things the right way.'

'What are you talking about?'

'Don't you see it yet?' Joe sat back for a moment. Then he tapped his finger slowly on the table to emphasize his words. 'That chap never meant to set fire to the mill at all.'

'I know he didn't. He---'

'Listen—' The finger tapped emphatically. 'He'd just gone in to hide, after a bit of trouble.'

'What trouble?'

'I'll think about that later. There was trouble all over the town, anyway. So he finds the door unlocked, and in he goes to hide.'

'But---'

'While he's there, he pulls out his pipe. One way and another he gets a bit careless and the place is set on fire. See?'

'But Joe, this is all---'

'That's why he told us about it. It's the sort of thing a man might do if he'd just been careless.'

'Joe, I don't believe a word of this.'

'It don't matter a dam' whether you believe it or not. It was an accident, do you see?' Joe paused, and looked Robert hard in the eyes. 'It wasn't arson, and it wasn't riot. It was an accident, and we can claim on the insurance for that. Have you got it?'

'What!' Robert must have sounded as incredulous as he

felt. 'You know very well we can't do that.'

'I've just told you that we can.'

'But—' He broke off, hardly knowing what to say. He had not entirely grasped the thought that Joe really meant it. 'You know perfectly well that that fire was deliberate.'

'I dam' well don't.'

'You saw for yourself that all that stuff had been stacked against the wall before it was lit.'

'There's nobody knows about that but you and me. I'd kicked it down before the rest came in.'

'Yes, but---'

'I've worked pretty hard at this, let me tell you, and I thought you might have said a thank you, not start talking as if I'd no sense.'

'It's not a matter of sense. It's---'

'I don't know what's come over you, I don't really. Now just listen for a minute. We start with this chap Holt, and he has to say he came in here to get out o' the way of them Specials, and he lit his pipe. Of course you'll say you left the place unlocked.'

'Holt didn't come in here. He was walking-

'For God's sake, shut up. He'll say what he's told to say, if he wants to keep out of——'

'Joe, you're not serious?'

'Serious?' Joe's voice had hardened suddenly. 'Do you think I've been mucking round all week just for a joke? We're going to have our money back.'

'It's a plain fraud.'

'Don't be so dam' nasty. You're getting insulting, let me tell you. What do you think we pay insurance for, if we're not to have our money back?'

'It's plain fraud. In any case, why suppose the insurance company is made up entirely of fools? Do you think they won't smell a rat?'

'They can smell a cesspool, if they want to. The point is, they can't prove it.'

'Joe, I'll have nothing whatever to do with this. It's silly, and it's dangerous, and it's downright fraud into the bargain. You ought to know better.'

'Hey, who are you talking to?'

'I'm talking to you, and it's time someone did. I didn't come into business to be dishonest, and I shall tell the truth about this to anyone who asks for it. That means the insurance men.'

'Hell!' Joe was on his feet now, staring at his partner in plain unbelief. 'Don't talk like that to me.'

'I don't wish to. But I won't have lying, and I won't have fraud. You've chosen the wrong man.'

'I dam' well have.' Joe stood back, red faced and breathing hard. 'I'm not having words like that from you. You'll say something else, and you'll say it pretty quick, if you want to stay my partner.'

'Joe, do you think we need quarrel about this?'

'Yes, I do. I'm dam' well sick of you, and the way you carry

on. I've done everything that's worth doing in this firm so far----'

'Have you kept the looms going? Do you even know how to?'

'We're not talking about looms. We're talking about you, and I've had enough. You can either come to your senses or we break this partnership here and now.'

'Very well, if we must.'

He gave the answer firmly, quite sure that there was none other he could give. Then he waited, standing stiffly now, and suddenly aware of a dry throat and a tremor inside him as he had the first understanding of what it meant, and of what it would mean in the months to come. He might wait a long time, in these days, for another to finance him.

'Is that all you can say?' Joe's voice rang hard as he spoke

again. 'Let's hear from you.'

'About what? It's you that's talking of breaking it up.'

'And about time too! I'm just fed up with pouring money into this. It's buying looms and cotton and coals, wages for this and wages for that—there's no end to it. What do you think you owe me by this time?'

'You know we're beginning to make a profit.'

'We were doing, until you went and left the place for any dam' Chartist to walk into. And if that wasn't enough, you go and use insulting language to me when I show you how to get the money back. I've had enough, and I'm going straight to Bolton to have this partnership finished.'

'You'll get a deal more back if we work these looms.'

'Well, I'm not working 'em with you, and you can make up your mind to that.' Joe reached violently for his hat, and there was a curt finality in the tone. 'I'll see Bolton. And while I'm doing it, you can get right out of my mill and stay out. You don't come back, see?'

'I'll do nothing of the sort. I'm a partner in this firm till it's properly wound up, and until that's done I keep my rights as a partner. I'm staying here.'

'You can stay where you like. But don't think I'm putting

up another halfpenny for you, because I'm not.'

'You can tell the men so when their pay's due. They'll probably wreck the place.'

'Oh, go to hell!'

The door slammed behind him; and Robert, much less calm than he had been, was left to pace about the empty office, contemplating the ruin that had come upon him so quickly and completely. There had been vague threats before, but this was different, as he sadly knew. Even if it were patched up, it would break out again. He could not work on terms of trust with a man whose notions of what was honest were so far from his own; and he had understood at last that Joe had been in earnest about his scheme, and had even expected gratitude.

He turned bitterly to think of what the future held. Under the agreement he could claim only one-third of the stock and looms, and he could not claim even that until Joe had been repaid what he had advanced for working expenses. There would be very little left after that, and his one-third of it would be a few pounds at most. He had, in effect, lost his savings, all hope of profits to come, and all excuse for pressing Anna to marry him. He could not ask that of her when he had no money and no prospects. He wondered if there was anything he could do to patch this up, to make the partnership last until it had earned enough to repay those working expenses; but he knew that this lay with Joe, who was not likely to change his mind unless he could have his way with the insurance claim. The only point of hope seemed to be that Joe would have to give a month's notice, and somebody might think of something in that time.

All his wish now was to talk with Anna, but it was still only half past four, and he could not, in either pride or conscience, run from the mill when the engine was at work, and the shuttles flying to and fro. So he stayed, somehow, till seven o'clock. Then he lost no time, and when he entered the parlour at Cumberland House Nicholas was sitting comfortably with a glass of brandy. Anna was there, and Ellen, and Ann Thornber. It looked almost as if he had interrupted a family conference, and for a moment he wondered if he ought to slip away. Then Ellen saw him.

'I never heard of such a thing,' she said. 'There's Ann nearly out of her mind, and I don't blame her for that, though where we're going to put her I don't know. He's two months short, and he always was.'

'Have a drink?' said Nicholas.

'I walked out at once,' said Ann. 'There's a great deal I'll

bear if I must, but some things I owe to myself. I've said so all----

'Quite right,' said Ellen.

At the side of the room he was suddenly aware that Anna was watching him intently. He turned, meeting her eyes, and he could see no sign of amusement in her. Then she came forward to his rescue.

'What Ellen means,' she said, 'is that Tom has been wed.'

'Married?'

'If you like the word better. He was married in Manchester, to Ruth Ratcliffe. He came home this afternoon, and he brought her with him.'

'I walked straight out,' said Ann. 'I always said I would and he's himself to thank for it. She's twenty-three, and it's to be her house! Very well, I said, but it's Father's house too, and he has his gruel and brandy at five o'clock. Then out I walked.'

'I don't mind the brandy,' said Nicholas, 'but the gruel must be hell.'

'Don't say things like that,' said Ellen. 'It's not the time for it, with poor Tom wed, and not even a band, and how you can be wed without a band I don't know. What would the clergyman think, with no band?'

'There wasn't one,' said Nicholas.

'I've just told you there wasn't.'

'I mean there wasn't a clergyman. They don't have 'em, at a Register Office.'

'Register?' Even Robert was so startled that he spoke

suddenly, and Ellen turned to him at once.

'Yes,' she snapped. 'A place like that, for Tom to be married in! I've always thought they were for folk who couldn't enter a church, but I did think they had a clergyman. How can you be wed without a clergyman? It's like having dinner without a cook. Do you think Tom's wed at all?'

Then Anna intervened suddenly.

'Ellen,' she said, 'this isn't Robert's affair, and I want to talk to him. Would you mind very much if I took him to the other room?'

'No, of course not. But Tom wed like that, no band and no clergyman! I don't see how you can get——'

She was in full voice about it when Anna led Robert from

the room. She took him into the dining-room, and then wheeled to face him.

'What's wrong?' she asked.

'About what?'

'You. I saw how you looked when you came in.'

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THE SUGGESTION

'Ir had to come,' was her comment when he had told her. 'You and Joe were not made for each other.'

'But I did think I could work with him for a year or so. If we only had six months more we could pay our debts and have some money to take out. As it is, we lose everything. At least, I do.'

'How about Joe?'

'I suppose he has a choice. If he sells the looms he can have his money back—what he's advanced, I mean. Of course, he'll lose his profits, just as I shall.'

'That won't suit him. What's his other choice?'

'Not take back what he's advanced. He'd pretty well own the business then, looms and all.'

'Quite a good bargain. Robert, do you think that's what he's after? He may always have had it in his head to break the partnership once you had the looms running for him. It's the sort of thing that would suit Joe.'

'Well, if you're right it ends the last hope of patching this up. He'll make sure we don't. I'm sorry.'

'What have you to be sorry about?'

'I'd hoped for so much, with—with you, Anna, once the firm was going, and——'

'Silly!' She cut him short, her hand on his arm again. 'Do you think it makes any difference?'

'I may have to go back to being a clerk again.'

'I'd be sorry, for your sake. It wouldn't make any other difference. What do you think I am?'

'Oh. Anna, I---' He had her suddenly in his arms. 'You

do understand?'

'Of course I do. You couldn't have helped it.'

She stayed very close, heartening him by her very warmth and nearness, and she was smiling faintly as he kissed her. But her thoughts seemed to be running beyond that.

'You're not to blame yourself,' she told him. 'You couldn't have done anything else. We don't have dishonesty, and we aren't going to. But I wish we could talk to Nick about it.'

'He seems busy.'

'It's this Thornber upset. Tom does seem to have had a wedding in a Register Office.' There was an echo now of a tone he had heard before. 'Ellen's quite right about the band, you know. She usually is, when you've worked out what she means.'

'And what does she mean this time?'

'Getting wed in the Parish church, with a crowd and a band—that's what's expected of a Thornber, and if he does it like this we needn't ask twice what the town will think. That's what's worrying Ellen.'

'Can we do anything to help?'

'Make Tom welcome, and his Ruth with him.'

'In the-er-circumstances?'

'If they've started badly, that might be all the more reason for giving them a chance. Let's go and hear what Ellen's talking about.'

She led impulsively to the parlour again, where Nicholas, still lazily in his chair, was listening to Ellen, who was telling him what he ought to do. Neither she nor Ann, she was saying, would go near Tom at present, so Nicholas would have to go instead. There was a house called Haverholt, not five minutes' walk from the mill, which still belonged to her father, and it would have to be made ready for Ann.

'Though how it's to be made comfortable, I don't know,' she told him. 'In a house like that——'

'What's wrong with it? We used to live in it ourselves, when

I was your father's partner.'

'Did you ever look into the kitchen?'

'Of course I didn't. Why should I? But what's wrong with Haverholt? It's a bit old, I admit, and the roof isn't what it used to be——'

'It isn't any of it what it used to be, and it never used to be much. It's nasty and cold and damp.'

'Then why put Ann in it?'

'She'll have to make the best of it. I expect the floors are rotten, too, and he'll have to look at those, and he'll have to give her half the furniture, besides Father's. I expect it will want painting, too.'

'Who pays for all this?'

'Tom will, of course.'

'Suppose he says he won't?'

'Well, someone will have to. It's Ann's work to look after Father, and he can't stay where he is, with this Ruth to give him his gruel. I can't remember her other name.'

'Thornber. When you ring that bell now, you ask for Mrs.

Thornber.'

'Then it will be a long long day before I ring that bell.'

At the side of the room Robert caught Anna's eye, and he quietly followed her as she tip-toed to the door. Ellen, indignantly discussing furniture, hardly seemed to see their going.

At the foot of the stair Anna paused, with her hand on the latch. She turned to face him.

'You did quite right.' Her voice was as clear as it was quiet. 'You could not have joined with Joe in that insurance scheme. So don't regret it, and don't worry about it.' For an instant she glanced up the stair. 'I'm afraid it wasn't worth your waiting tonight.'

'No. I began to think that Ellen would soon send me to Vivary Bridge.'

'I'll take you there myself. What do you think they'll be driven to, if nobody's friendly?'

'It-it's a good thought, Anna.'

'Then why has nobody else had it?'

'They aren't like you.'

'Robert, I think you're improving. But isn't it time we went to Greenfield again?

'Very well.'

He had two encounters next morning which he found encouraging. A letter came from Harry Bolton, briefly stating that Joe had given notice to end the partnership, and Robert walked up Market Street for a word about this. Bolton recited the terms of the agreement, and declared that Joe was within his rights. Then he let the agreement lie unheeded on his desk.

'It seems a pity,' he said. 'It looked as if you were establishing your business remarkably well. I'd have expected it to last

longer than this.'

'Didn't Hoyle tell you why he's ending it?'

'No.'

Robert promptly told him, and Bolton took it without much need of questions. Then he pursed his lips.

'For a man in business,' he said calmly, 'you seem surprisingly honest.'

'Surprisingly?'

'Well, yes.' Again there was the slight pause and the pursing of the lips. 'In the course of my practice I hear a good deal about what is suggested and done, and my advice is sometimes directed to keeping my clients the right side of the law. Men take what advantages they can.'

'Does this mean that you approve of this scheme of Hoyle's?'

'It means nothing of the sort. But I've heard of such things before. Some men would think you a little—innocent, Mr. Shaw. Long may you remain so!'

'I beg your pardon?'

'There's no need to. I've seen rather too much of the other thing, and where it can lead a man. Now——' He tapped suddenly at the agreement on his desk. 'I can't help you in this, but if I should have a client who seeks a partner, may I mention your name?'

'I'd be glad if you would.'

'There's no one at the moment, you understand, but one never knows. I'll bear all this in mind, if any chance should arise.'

Which, as Robert reflected a few minutes later, was a glimpse of a new Bolton. He had thought of the man as stiff and irascible, rather filled with his own importance, though there had never been any doubt of his competence. But here was a hint of something more; and the attorney, it seemed, could also be human, when he was known a little better.

At that moment Tom Thornber came walking up the street, and Robert, pleased and heartened by his talk with Bolton, remembered what Anna had said. He put himself squarely in front of Tom.

'Good morning! Glad to see you back.'

'Back from what?' It came in Tom's best growl.

'Getting wed, from what I've heard.'

'It's no dam' business of yours, is it?'

'Well, we do live in the same town. I can wish you happiness. I suppose?'

ness, I suppose?

'Eh?' Tom stood glaring at him, with his jaw thrust out, and suspicion in every line of his face. 'Are you trying to be funny?'

'No, I'm not. I'm glad you're married, and I'm hoping

you'll be happy with it. Is that straight enough?'

'You're the first that's talked that way.' There was another hard pause. 'All right, then, if you're not being funny.'

'I'd like to meet your wife.'

'You'd what?' The change of tone was almost startling. 'Hey, do you mean that?'

'She's worth meeting, isn't she?'

'Aye, she is. Well——' Tom's whole face had changed now, and there was a light in his eyes. 'Come round tonight, then.'

'I'm not sure about tonight.'

'Come tomorrow, then. Come any time you can. We'll be glad to see you. I did say to Ruth, there's one or two in this town not as bad as you might think. Are you still walking Anna England out?'

'Well, yes.'

'Bring her with you. That'll make four, and we'll get on fine. She'll like Ruth.'

'Very well.' Anna had suggested this, and would now have

to put up with it. 'I think we can do it tomorrow.'

'Half past seven, then, and glad to see you. I mean Anna, you know, not those dam' sisters of mine. Don't go bringing them.'

'Of course I won't.'

'You wouldn't believe the things they've been saying about Ruth. It's time they learnt to shut up a bit.'

'Perhaps they do talk rather a lot.'

'I've known looms that made less clacking. Half past seven.'

He went rolling away, leaving Robert with the thought that for the second time this morning he had seen a new side to a man. He had certainly not seen Tom in quite this mood before.

'Of course we'll go,' said Anna, when he told her. 'You did

quite right. Besides, I want to see her.'

'I hope you enjoy it.'

'The main thing is that Tom shall enjoy it. Nick went to see him, by the way, this afternoon.'

'What happened?'

'Tom grumbled a lot, but he's agreed to put Haverholt ready for Ann. He's even said she can have some furniture. Mind you, he's made it a condition that she takes her father with her. He says it's Ann's duty to look after Father. It seems to be the one thing he and Ellen agree about.'

Then Nicholas came gustily in, and he seemed to take it for

granted that Robert had come to see him.

'We might have some peace for half an hour,' he said. 'I've been hearing about you and this insurance claim.'

'It's dishonest.'

'It might also be a bit silly.'

'I said he needn't think the insurance men are all fools.'

They might have to pay, mind you. You could trust Joe to watch his details, and they wouldn't be able to prove much. The point is, it wouldn't be worth it, for a little claim like that. If he ever had to put in a big claim——'

'Oh, I see.'

'Well, that's just what Joe can't see. I've told you before that he isn't quite as clever as he thinks he is. He can't understand that what men think of you does matter in the end. But what comes next?'

'I don't know. I haven't had time to look round.'

'You won't see a lot when you do. These aren't times when men want to put money into businesses. What's Joe's next move?'

'He can sell up and have his money back, or he can keep the business running and have the profits. I don't know which he'll do.'

'You can take it that selling up is about the last thing Joe

means to do. He wants a profit, and the only way to have it is to work those looms.'

'Then I suppose that's what he'll do.'

'Does he know how to?'

'I suppose he could find somebody?'

'Can you think of anyone?'

The retort came instantly, sharp and challenging, and for a moment Nicholas waited. Then, as no answer came, he took the deliberate tone again.

'The fact is, there's only one man in this town who knows much about power-looms, and that's yourself. Thornber comes next, and Sagar and Holroyd are finding out, but they have their own mills and they're no use to Joe.'

'He could go to another town for somebody.'

'A man who's any good would want a bit of tempting to come here. He'd want better terms than Joe would like giving, and if he has a grain of sense he'd make a few inquiries about Joe. Well——' Nicholas paused, and then his tone became incisive. 'He'll get the answer. I'll promise that, and so will one or two others, from what I've heard.'

'Well done!' said Anna softly.

'It's what I was telling you. Joe's never understood that a good name's worth something, and I think he's going to find out. In another week or two you may have him changing his mind. Does that suit you?'

'Not very well.'

'How can it?' Anna slipped herself suddenly into the talk again. 'Do some thinking yourself, Nick. How can he ever work with Joe again? How can they ever trust each other?'

'I don't know about trusting, Anna, but work's another matter, and it's surprising what you can do when you have to.' He turned back to Robert, and his tone was quiet and level. 'You may have to take him. I can understand that you don't want to, but you may have to. Things may be different when we're rid of these Chartists, but just at present I don't see anybody putting his money into a loomshop. Your looms are running, I suppose?'

'Oh yes.'

'Then keep them at it. The more profit you're making, the less Joe will want to lose it. But don't look as if you're trying to please him. That's bad for Joe.'

The next day was Friday, when money was usually put ready for the paying of wages on Saturday, and Robert was without the cash. Joe was missing, and had said in the heat of the quarrel that he would advance no more cash for anything. Robert had therefore some cause for anxiety, and when Joe walked into the office at mid-morning he was quickly asked what he meant to do.

'We'll have to pay the lads, of course. What do you take me for?' Joe looked as if his feelings were hurt by this insinuation, 'It's what I've come in for. How much is it?'

Robert passed him the slip, and Joe did not even growl at it. He merely nodded.

'I'll go and get it,' he said. 'How's things here?'

'It'll be a full week's output. Better than last week.'

'I'm glad to hear it.'

'So you should be. You'd better take your profits while you can. At the end of a month there won't be any.'

Robert had achieved something sardonic in his tone, and Joe blinked. Then he looked hurt again.

'You needn't talk like that,' he said. 'It doesn't help.'

'Three weeks and two days to be exact.'

'Well, it might suit us to run another week or two, till we're both fixed up. You never know, do you?'

'I thought you did know.'

'That's no reason why we shouldn't part friendly, and help each other along a bit.'

'I'm glad you think so.'

'There's one thing we don't want to do, and that's to lose our money.'

'I think we are going to lose it. Now suppose you go and get that cash?'

'There's no sense in cutting off our noses to spite our faces. That's what I always say.'

'I'm sure you do. Go and get that cash.'

Anna was ready at the foot of the stair when Robert called at Cumberland House that night, and she led out of the house at once. She showed some signs of amusement as they set off down the street.

'Ellen doesn't approve,' she said. 'She doesn't think anyone ought to go visiting Tom just now, and I can't think of a

better way of driving him into his worst mood. I do wonder what she's like, though.'

'Who?'

'Ruth, of course. If she's really fond of him, that could make all the difference.'

'I'm not sure that you can be fond of Tom.'

'The trouble might be that not enough people have tried to.' Tom was at the door to welcome them, and he almost hurried them in. Then he was describing Robert as "an old friend o' mine" as he made the introductions to his wife, who, to Robert's surprise, was almost exactly as she had been described. She was perhaps too young to be called fat, but she was something more than plump. She had blue eyes, with a very white skin and a soft round face that was pleasant enough, even if it hinted at no great force within. She looked a friendly creature, pleased with her new status, and very willing to receive her guests. She had a smile from the outset, and would laugh at the smallest joke; and whenever she did so her soft flesh shook and quivered, exactly as the reports had said. But Ruth was likeable. She looked so pleased with everything. and so proud of her Tom, and she was so obviously trying to be friendly that it was impossible not to be friendly in return. Tom looked as proud of his Ruth as she was of him, and he was soon beaming at everyone as he exerted himself to play the host. He was lavish with his wine, and almost embarrassing in the way he pressed it on them, and Ruth had been as lavish with the cakes and pastries. Robert and Anna, who had both had a meal already, were content to nibble, but nothing deterred either Tom or Ruth. They kept stretching out for another, and between them, in the course of an evening, they cleared a tableful of food that would have lasted most people for a week. It seemed to have no effect on either of them, and Tom grew more genial than ever.

'Nice of you to come,' he said noisily. 'You know, there's only one living soul in this town with a decent word for Ruth, and that's the old man up there.'

'You mean your father?'

'Aye. That ugly sister of mine walked out, and Ruth's having to look after him.'

'It's good of you,' said Anna.

'Well, someone has to.' Ruth spoke for herself in a light

high-pitched voice. 'We can't leave him to starve. Besides, he's a dear.'

'I don't suppose you want to go on doing it, though?'

'She isn't going to,' said Tom. 'It's not what she's wed for. You know that house up the road there?'

'Haverholt?'

'That's it. Ann's going in there, and the old man's going with her. He doesn't know it yet, but he is.'

'Do you think Ann will like it?'

'I don't. It's a dam' ruin of a place, but she asked for it and she can have it.' He chuckled happily. 'I've given 'em five days to be ready wi' t' paint. Ten per cent off cost if they're late.'

'And she can have all the furniture she wants,' said Ruth.

'Within reason, you know. What's my sister been saying?' 'Ellen?' Anna was watching him cautiously. 'I think she's disappointed. You were married without a band.'

'What!' He sounded stupefied for a moment. 'Whose

wedding was it, anyway?'

'That's the point. Ellen thinks it's a family affair. She

expected to go to your wedding.'

'Band and all, hey? That's what she had at her own wedding, and I've not forgotten it. I was nine years old, and what do you think they dressed me in? Red velvet and a lace collar!'

'You?' There was a sudden sharpness in Anna's voice, and

her eyes had brightened.

'Aye. She'd a whole row of little girls all dressed in pink. The parson patted their heads, and one of 'em was sick. They're all alike women and weddings. They drive me mad.'

'I see what you mean, Tom. All the same, women do like that sort of wedding.' There was certainly a quiver in her eyebrows now. 'But I remember that red velvet.'

'Eh?' His mouth dropped open in surprise. 'Do you mean you were there?'

'It was Nick's wedding, too, you know.'

'Do you mean you were one of them in pink?'

'I was sick.'

'Well, I'm——' He was staring at her in chuckling delight. 'Fancy me not knowing!'

'I never knew it was you in the velvet. But you see how it is with Ellen? She wanted that sort again, and she's disappointed.'

'Oh aye?' His tone changed suddenly, and his face had darkened. 'But there's a bit more to it than that. She's saying

something against Ruth, isn't she? She's saying we had a reason for getting wed quick?'

'Register Offices aren't usual, Tom.'

'That's no one's business but mine.'

'You might have been wise, though, to tell her a little more.

Did you tell anything to Ann?'

'No, I didn't. She said some dam' nasty things about Ruth, and then she was away up the road before we'd turned round twice.'

Then Ruth put in a word, and she seemed a little more alive to things than he was.

'But, Tom dear,' she said, 'if you never tell anybody any-

thing we shall have everybody thinking——'

'That's all right, love.' He was suddenly patting her shoulder fondly. 'There's folk and there's other folk, and I don't mind telling Anna.'

'It was only Father.'

'I know it was.' He turned quickly to Anna again. 'You see, Ruth's father's a bit queer.'

'He isn't.'

'That's all right, love. Don't take on.' He waved what he thought was a calming hand at Ruth. 'I don't mean he's cracked, but he can't abide parsons. He's had a lot of trouble with 'em, and he said he'd cut Ruth right out if she had any truck with 'em. Said he wouldn't sell any more cloth for me, either. Well, we're not daft, so we let him have his way, see?'

He had propped himself against the hearth, and now he stood there looking satisfied, as if he thought he had put everything to rights. He evidently considered the matter was settled as he seized the decanter again.

seized the decanter again.

'Let's have another drink,' he said. 'Hey, what's this about you and Joe? Are you fed up with him?'

'Perhaps he's fed up with me,' said Robert.

'Don't talk daft. But I know a bit about Joe Hoyle, let me tell you, and I've something against him. He put on me.' A swelling indignation was suddenly in Tom's voice. 'He sold me the stuff for my gas plant, and he charged me too much. The man wasn't telling the truth.' The wine slopped suddenly out of his glass as he waved it excitedly. 'I've been thirteen years in business in this town, and no one ever put on me yet, till Joe Hoyle did it.'

'I fancy he put on a good many folk over that business.'

'Aye, he did, and there's some of them that know it. I don't mind a man making what's fair, but he wants it too quick.'

'That's more or less what I've found.'

'Well, I did wonder when you were going to wake up. What are you going to do? Start on your own?'

'I can't afford it.'

'Oh?' Tom looked nonplussed for a moment. 'I suppose you'll have to take up with someone else. Who will it be?'

'I don't know yet. There's hardly anyone in the town who

knows about power-weaving.'

'You don't want a chap who knows about it. He'd be telling you what to do.'

'Yes, but---'

'What you want is a chap to put his money in, and then go to sleep. If he woke up once a month it'ud be enough for me.

Sleepy, that's how you want him.'

Anna moved slightly in her chair. She turned her head and for an instant she looked at Robert, and some quality in her eyes jerked him to attention. It was as if she had told him that this was of importance. But a moment later she had turned away again, and Tom had noticed nothing. He went rambling on, full of assurance.

'You don't want a cotton man,' he said. 'A man in another trade's what you want, who wouldn't mind a bit of money in cotton.'

'A quiet man,' said Anna. 'Even if some folk would call him

sleepy. That's what Tom means.'

She had turned to Robert again, and for another moment he stared back puzzled, unable to read what he knew was in her eyes. Then, all in one instant, it fell into place, and he knew she meant John Phillips, who was quiet, and thought to be sleepy. A faint smile came to her, and then the smallest of nods, as if she had seen him guess it. Then she was turning to Tom again, while his own thoughts went racing to remember John's complaints about the corn trade, his new steam engine, and the space he had to spare.

Anna kept Ruth firmly in talk for the rest of the evening, and no one had a chance to speak again of partners or of cotton. It was nearly ten o'clock, and the June night was settling into darkness, when she and Robert were at last allowed to go, and Tom was full of the noisiest good will as he bade them good night at the door.

'Come again any time,' he told them. 'We always like to see our friends, Ruth and me, and you needn't wait to be asked. Just come.'

The night seemed quiet by contrast as they crossed the little bridge and heard the ripple of the stream below. The mill was black against a luminous sky, and there was a thin whisp of smoke from the chimney to tell of work that would begin again at seven. Tom would be different then.

'I used to dislike Tom,' said Anna suddenly. 'But I couldn't, now. What did you make of that tale about her father dis-

liking parsons?'

'It surprised me. But I don't think Tom's a liar.'

'Anyway, I'm going to think well of Tom. We ought to be grateful to him.'

'Why?'

'Hasn't he led to a useful thought?'

They were on the steep slope of Spring Lane now, still below the houses, and for a moment he stopped. He saw Anna watching him.

'You mean John?' he said slowly.

'He seemed to fit.'

'You think Tom meant it?'

'Oh no. But it fitted, just the same. And you can't go on with Joe, whatever Nick says.'

'It would be difficult.'

'We're going to Greenfield tomorrow.'

'I think it was suggested.'

'A little more than that.' There was a slight change of tone. 'I happened to meet John in the town today, and I told him to expect us. I said you wanted to talk to him.'

AGREEMENT

JOHN PHILLIPS was as welcoming as ever the next night, but it was not until Susan was thinking of bed for the children that Robert had a chance to turn the talk to what he wanted. Even then, he hardly knew how best to do it, and he was pleased when John made the first move himself. He had been in the town yesterday, he said, and he had heard of the quarrel with Joe. He now asked for details, and Robert was glad enough to tell him.

'It's like Joe,' same the slow comment at the end. 'I've always thought it a mistake that you had him as a partner. But what's ne up to now? What does he really want?'

'Another partner, I think, if he can get one. But he's in an

odd mood, these days.'

'He certainly is.' John spoke emphatically. 'I heard about him from Bolton yesterday after we'd been talking of another matter. Bolton's quite human at times, you know, and after we'd finished our business he chose to talk. He said that Joe's now taken to pestering the Justices about this man Holt, the weaver.'

'You mean the tale that Holt started that fire at the mill?'

'Not at all. Holt helped to break Nick's windows at Cumberland House, and Joe's complaining about that. He says nobody's been charged with it, and somebody should have been. Apparently he had a whole list of incidents—windows broken, and so on—and asked why nobody had been charged. It was a sort of general complaint against the magistrates.'

'What did Bolton say?'

'Told Joe to mind his cwn business.'

'Quite right.'

'Yes, but Joe didn't. Still, according to Bolton, Joe marched out and transferred his complaints to the Hole i' th' Wall. That's to say he started telling everybody that the magistrates aren't interested in folk who fire mills and break windows. He seems to be quite worked up about it. So when I'd heard all this I went across to the Hole i' th' Wall, and Joe was there.'

'Talking in that strain?'

'He was one stage further. He was telling them that it won't stop at Chartists. We've plenty of rough characters in the town, he said, and once they find it's safe to break windows they'll all take to thieving that way. Break the glass and grab. That's what Joe was saying, and he had a whole ring of them listening to him. Can you make sense of it?'

'No.'

'Nor can I. Whatever's said about Joe, I'd certainly have called him robust. *Not* a nervous fellow, and this isn't like him at all.'

'It doesn't sound like Joe to me.'

'Well, it is Joe. I heard him myself.' John paused as if he expected a comment, and then his expression changed. It became almost quizzical as he gazed at Robert. 'Bolton told me something else, by the way.'

'Yes?'

'Yes.' John seemed now to be between satisfaction and amusement. 'He asked me how trade was going, and then he asked me if I'd like to invest a little money in cotton. He added that he could recommend you as a partner. What do you think of it?'

There was a moment of utter silence in the room, while Robert's thought went flying to his last talk with Bolton, who had certainly hinted at something like this. By some compulsion he turned his head, and in one quick glance at Anna he read in her eyes that she was as surprised as he. Then he tried to bring his thoughts to an answer.

'Isn't it a matter of what you think?' he said. 'You have the money, and I haven't. I need a partner.'

'So do I, if I wish to try cotton.'

'But do you?'

'I think I'd better.' Again the slow smile came to him, and seemed to linger. 'I've told you how the corn trade's going, and I remember Anna telling me outright that I ought to try cotton.'

'Did I. John?'

'You know you did.' His smile broadened, and then he turned quickly back to Robert. 'I should never have let you sign with Joe. I ought to have been there first.'

'But John, I never knew--'

'Nor did I—then. I was too slow. But if Joe's antics give me a second chance I'm not going to miss it. What do you say?'

'John, you know very well there's no man I'd sooner work with.' Between relief and pleasure, Robert was throbbing with impatience now, and he had some trouble not to show it. 'Would you tell me what you have in mind—what sort of an arrangement?'

'Broadly, I suppose, what you had with Joe. I provide looms

and a place for them. You manage them.'

'Very well.' For a moment he hesitated. 'I'm afraid that after what I've lost with Joe I shan't be able to put much

capital in.'

'You're not asked to. I've said I'll provide the looms, or at any rate the first lot. As to profits, we can work those details out later, and I don't suppose they'll give much trouble. I'm more concerned about some other matters. These aren't days for laying out more money than you must, especially on inflammable things like looms. Do you think Joe means to sell?'

'Not if he can work them. But we can always buy others.'

'I'd sooner have Joe's. They're all tried and tested, and if you have the looms you'll probably get the loomers and the tacklers too. And why have Joe working looms in competition, with everything left ready for him? How about selling the cloth, by the way?'

'Leave that to me. Dick Bradley won't go to Joe.'

'I'll certainly leave it to you. But I think you'd better leave it to me to deal with Joe about the looms.'

'If you wish.'

'I do.' There was a sudden firmness in the quiet voice. 'I'm perhaps more used to bargaining, and I can deal with Joe more as a stranger.'

'You'll see him quite soon, I hope?'

'It might be better not to. But I promise I'll sign an agreement that will give you at least as much as you had with Joe. In return, I expect, of course, your promise to sign it also.'

'Given.' The reply was immediate, and Robert could not keep a note of satisfaction out of his voice. 'I'm afraid Joe is going to have a shock. He was hinting yesterday that he might like to go on for an extra week or two.'

'Oh, was he? When do you finish with him?'

'July twelfth. One calendar month from the break-up.'

'Well, that's a little short, if we're to have everything ready here, so if he says it again you might accept an extra month. Not more, though.' 'Very well, if he offers. How many looms can you put in here?'

'Not your full two hundred, I'm afraid. We'll have to look at it together. Now I hope you're as satisfied as I am?'

'I'm delighted.'

'And Anna?'

'I've been hoping for it for weeks past.'

'I suspect you of some pulling of strings.'

'Be charitable, John.'

'You don't need that, Anna. You merely need to be appreciated, and I hope Robert does it.'

'How should I know?'

'You wouldn't, of course. And Tom Thornber wed, I'm told?' He turned cheerfully to Robert. 'You seem to be falling behind.'

'John, I don't know what----'

'Anna does. Look at her.' His soft chuckle of amusement filled a tingling silence. 'But I suppose that one of these days you'll be in partnership again with your brother-in-law?'

'With my-' Robert stopped short, not quite quick enough

to follow this, and the chuckle came again.

'With your wife's sister's husband, if you prefer it that way. We're all waiting for news, you know. You should hear Susan about it.'

'Shall we talk of something else?' said Anna.

'Until Susan comes. There's not much else she can talk about.'

It was enough to put Robert's thoughts in a ferment, and he did not take Anna home that night by the direct road. He made a circuit round instead, walking across the fields until they found the stream that rippled down past Vivary Bridge, and in the soft warm dusk of June she made no objection. But her thoughts seemed for the moment to be of other things.

'What an evening!' she said. 'Robert, I hope you're satisfied?'

'Oh—er—yes.' He had to adjust himself to it hurriedly. 'You mean about the partnership?'

'I'd no notion he was thinking like that about you.'

'Nor had I. Of course Bolton did ask if he might mention it.'
'John had thought of it without him. And about time too!'

'You seem very sure of it.'

'Of course I'm sure of it. You'll be safe with John as you

never were with Joe, and I can't tell you how glad I am. You'll be at Greenfield too, with John and Susan.'

'I'll be working there.'

'They'll probably ask you to live there again, as you used to do.'

'Where will you be?'

'I don't know, but----'

'Then it's time you did know. John was right about that, too.'

There was a slight pause. The light had all but gone, but he could see that she had looked quickly towards him and then

away. No answer came, and he went steadily on.

'There's no question of my wanting to live with John and Susan, at Greenfield or anywhere else. And please don't tell me you're thinking of going off to Bingley again, or Leeds. We've played about for long enough, and it's time we had our own affairs in hand.'

'You've been a little busy, haven't you?'

'Perhaps I have. But---'

'There's no perhaps, Robert. And playing about isn't at all the word for what you've been doing. You've done it very well, though.'

'Well, never mind that. I---'

'But I've had to mind it. That's the whole point, and every-

thing else had to wait.'

'Then it needn't wait any longer. I'm surely settled now, with John, and the last day or two I've been seeing myself back a clerk again. It's been a nightmare.'

'But it's over now. You're not dreaming it.'

'If you'll say that you'll marry me, Anna, I shall think I'm dreaming again.'

'Oh?' They were by the stream now, and she stopped in her

walk to face him. 'Would you like that dream?'

'Like it? Anna, I---'

is shouldn't have thought, really, that you were very good at dreaming. You're rather practical.'

'I can dream of you, at all events. I've been doing it ever

since that night I first met you.'

'At Wanless.' She spoke softly, and she seemed to be saying it for her own satisfaction. 'We sat horses together. Nick bargained about cotton with Barnard Crook, and you were so interested that you didn't notice me at all.'

'You remember even that? Why do you remember it so well?'

'Why do you?' Her voice came cool and steady, and he saw her head lift against a sky in which the first bright stars were shining. 'Didn't something begin that night?'

'It did for me. Are you saying that it did for you?'

'At least I've remembered.' She waited, as if she expected more from him, and then she moved a little closer. 'What began that night?'

Something insistent had come into her tone, compelling him to answer, and for a moment he wrestled with it awkwardly.

Then he took courage, and went to what he knew was the truth.

'I suppose I fell in love with you. I must have done, there at that moment, just when I saw you.'

'Must have done?' Her head tilted against the blue of night in a style that made him wonder what the eyebrows were doing. 'Weren't you sure?'

'I wasn't sure of anything when I was home that night. It was all so different. I was to join Nick at his mill, and I ought to have been thinking only about that, but I wasn't. I was thinking of you, and I've been doing it ever since. I soon knew what it was, though. I was in love with you, even then, and I have been ever since, and I always shall be.'

'That's better.'

'Better than what?'

'Better than almost anything. You haven't really said it before.'

'Oh Anna, you've always known it's so.'

'But you haven't said it. I've been wondering when you would.'

'Well—' For a moment he felt baffled, and then he put it all aside and pressed doggedly for all that mattered. 'Well, I've certainly said it now, Anna, and please believe it's true.'

'I do.'

'Then it's your turn to say it. Anna, will you marry me?'

'Will I?' Against a spangled sky her head lost its tilt, and he knew she was looking very steadily at him. 'That would mean me in love too, wouldn't it?'

'Of course it would. Anna, couldn't you— 'He stopped short as some gleam of light seemed to break upon him. 'You

did say you remembered that night at Wanless? As well as I did?'

'Perhaps better.'

'What!'

'I wasn't fuddled with cotton, you see. And there was a supper at the Nelson, while it rained. And a talk by a stream at Broughton.'

'You remember all that? Those little things?'

'There weren't any others.'

'But—' He stood for a moment, while the light broke further. 'Then it was the same with you, Anna? It was?

'Of course it was.'

'Then—' He was holding her in his arms now. 'Then will you marry me?'

'Yes.'

'Oh Anna!' His breath was suddenly coming fast and quick. 'You mean it? Thank Heaven you've made up your mind at last.'

Her head tilted suddenly. Then there was a shake in her voice as she answered.

'Well, if you think that's the way to put it.'

'It doesn't matter how it's put.'

'No.' Something like a splutter came from Anna. 'It had better not.'

'I don't understand. But Anna-will you marry me?'

'I don't know what I should do if I couldn't.'

'Anna, it's-it's everything, all in one night.'

'Bless you.'

He tried to find more to say. But Anna, for some reason of her own, was laughing.

THE CRUSADER

'A WEDDING!' said Ellen. It's the first good news I've heard for a long time, and I couldn't think of anything better. Of course I've seen it coming, and now we can have a proper wedding in the family and about time too. I'm sure Anna know's what's due to her.'

'I don't remember her when she didn't,' said Nicholas.

He could evidently not refrain from the thrust, though he was looking as pleased as Ellen. Anna took it with a nod and the lift of an eyebrow, but Ellen began to bristle.

'Now do try to be sensible for once,' she told him. 'No girl ever gets a proper wedding unless she knows what's due to her, and it's going to be done properly by a clergyman this time.'

'How about the band?'

'Of course there must be a band. You can hire them at once.'

'It's Robert's wedding. He can hire the band.'

'You know very well that the bridegroom doesn't hire the band. The bride's father does all that.'

'Well, I'm not the bride's father.'

'Of course you're not. But---'

'I'm not old enough. She'll be twenty-eight next week, even if she isn't going to say so, and——'

'It doesn't matter what she is next week. The poor girl hasn't a father, and you're her elder brother and she's being married from your house——'

'Is she?'

'Well, of course she is. What else could she do?'

'She might be wed from her sister's house. Then Stick-in-themud could pay for the band and the trombone might wake him up a bit.'

'There's no reason at all why Anna should be married from Greenfield, and even if there was I don't know anything that's wrong with John Phillips.'

'Well, he won't spend a week on a job if a month will do.'
It was an opinion that had been heard before from Nicholas, and now, as the days slipped by, Robert began to think that it might almost be true. He was impatient to have the new part-

nership set going, and he thought that the first need was to come to terms with Joe about the looms. John took the opposite view. He said that Joe would not part with the looms as long as he could hope to run them for himself, and that he would therefore have to be left alone for a week or two. It was not unreasonable, and Nicholas heartily endorsed it, saying that the only way to deal with Joe was to let the steam out of him first. So Robert had to put up with it. He kept the looms going hard at Victoria mill, noting as he did so that each day's profit would make Joe less willing than before to sell the looms. Joe threw out some further hints about extending their time, but did not press for an answer, and Barnard Crook quietly told Robert that a man from Blackburn had been seen in the town, making inquiries about Joe and Victoria mill. He had some short answers and was seen no more; but there was no sign that Joe was much discouraged, and he was quickly at his genial best when he was told of the engagement of Robert and Anna. He even asked them to supper with himself and Jane.

There was also an odd contrast between Joe in one place and Joe in another. In his office he was cheerful and confident. In the town he was unmitigated gloom. He harped on the shortcomings of the magistrates, the lack of any protecting force, and failure of anybody to deal with Chartists who fired mills and broke windows. There would be more trouble with the Chartists, he predicted, and soon they would be joined in the streets by bands of roaming thieves, who would soon learn how easy it was. By mid-winter there would be nobody whose goods were safe. Then he said that a public meeting ought to be called to consider the possibility of having soldiers in the town, or a force of the new Rural Police. But he soon became gloomy about the probable incompetence of the Bluecoats, and he seemed to see very little hope for anybody's property.

'What's the matter with him?' asked Nicholas one night at Cumberland House. 'If there ever was a good hearty watch-out-for-yourself sort of chap it's Joe, and now he's whimpering about like a damned old woman. A bit more of this, and he'll be poking under his bed at nights to see if there's a burglar there. What's he trying to do?'

'He seems to be leading a sort of one-man crusade for the protection of property.'

'If Joe leads a crusade you expect to find something at the end of it for Joe, and I don't see anything in this one.'

'Protecting his mill, perhaps?'

'Spring-guns for Joe, not Police. Have you heard his latest about this public meeting?'

'It doesn't do any harm, I suppose?'

'Except to frighten folk. But why's he doing it?'

'I don't know.'

Nor did anybody else, and Joe began to say that it was now midsummer, and that they ought to have a force in the town before the dark nights came. Then Harry Bolton let it out that William Wood was inclined to agree with the notion of a public meeting, which might give him a useful chance to explain what the magistrates were doing. He was not in a hurry for it, but he was watching to see which way the feeling went.

There were some two weeks of this sort of thing before Joe had any more to say. In the first week of July, only ten days before their partnership was due to end, he came into the office one sunlit morning and asked what they were going to do about it. Robert, busy with the accounts, made a careful show of not being interested.

'I don't know,' he said. 'We're due to finish next Friday. Perhaps we'd better say Saturday, so we can finish the week.'

'You're not thinking of stopping next week, are you? We did say we'd run on a bit.'

'We'll give it a week or two longer, if you like. I could manage that.'

'Manage it?' Joe was suddenly suspicious. 'What does that mean? Have you been fixing something?'

'I shall work with John Phillips.'

'Well!' There was a red flush in Joe's face. 'You might have told me what you were doing.'

'Have you told me what you've been doing?'

'I've not been doing anything.'

'You've been trying to.'

'Don't be so dam' nasty. I am your brother-in-law, you know.'

There was a pause. Robert took up his pen and made play of being busy with the accounts. Joe looked sad and hurt.

'When do you take up with Phillips?' he said.

'I don't know.'

'Oh well—' Joe sounded suddenly happier. 'Hadn't we better run on for a bit?'

'I'll do another month, if you like.'

'What's the good of a month?'

'It's better than nothing.'

'Can't you make it longer?'

'No.'

'Just as you like, then. Anything suits me.'

Another week went by, and then they were within two days of a Friday which was expected to be momentous. It was the day on which the great Petition for the Charter was at last to be laid before Parliament, and for the Chartists it was the day of days, the day they had awaited through the bitter weeks while they paid their hard-spared pennies to the National Rent. Excitement began to mount. There were stirrings among the Chartists, and Joe took full advantage of that. He pressed more noisily his demand for a public meeting, and he won the support of Tom Thornber, who might have some private quarrels with Joe, but at least agreed with him about soldiers. Tom went to see Bolton about it, and then, to the general surprise, notices appeared in the town, summoning a meeting in two weeks' time to consider "the increasing danger to the inhabitants and the obtaining of an adequate permanent Military Force." Most of them were defaced the same night by Chartists, and Joe seized on the point at once. What could be done to notices could be done to windows, he said, and he did not seem to be short of listeners, especially among the shopkeepers.

He came into the office that same Wednesday morning for another word with Robert, and he now looked more determined, as if he meant to have something settled.

'Have you done any more thinking?' he asked. 'Are you

still sticking to one month?'

'Yes.'

'It would suit us better to make it three. Six, if you like.'

'I've promised Phillips.'

'All right then.' Joe was tight-lipped for a moment, but he made no attempt to argue to point. 'If you're fixed on your own way, you'll have to go it. Now I'm not having looms standing there cluttering the place up and doing nothing. I paid a lot of money for those looms.'

'I paid a third of it myself.'

'There's what I've lent for wages, and you owe me half of that.'

'Less my share of profits. Well, what do you wish to do about the looms? I shall sell my lot, of course.'

'Sell 'em to Phillips, I suppose? Well, you're not going to. The agreement says that if either partner wishes to sell, the other partner has first option, and I'm taking it. I'll buy 'em.'

Joe spoke with a snap, and Robert sat up sharply. There was an air of purpose in Joe, and he had the look of a man who knows what he means to do.

'I won't argue,' said Joe. 'I'll take 'em at the price we paid. I suppose vou've all the figures in that great book o' yours?'

Robert had, and Joe kept him briskly to it. In ten minutes they had it all plain, and Joe was writing a draft for forty-seven pounds, which was all that was left for Robert; though he would still have his share of profits for the extra month they were to run.

'Right,' said Joe. 'It's my mill, and they're all my looms, now.'

He sounded pleased with himself, and Robert sat carefully still.

'What will you do with them?' he asked. 'Have you found another partner?'

'How the hell should I find a partner in a town like this? You were counting on that, weren't you? You thought there'd be nobody buying but Phillips, and he'd take 'em at a price for dirt. Wasn't that it?'

'I thought you might find a partner from another town.'

'Oh, did you? And what about the things a man's told when he comes here asking?'

'I don't know what's been told to anybody.'

'Then you're about the only man in the place who doesn't.'

'That's quite possible. But what are you going to do, if you've no partner? Aren't you going to sell?'

'No, I'm not, and you can tell Phillips as plain as you like. Do you think I want three-quarters of the mill standing empty, bringing me in nothing?'

'Then what's it to be?'

'What you haven't thought of. I'm going to lease that part to anyone who'll take it, looms and all.' There was suddenly a gleam of triumph in his eyes. 'I've a complete weaving mill to let now, all fitted up and a going concern, a profit every week and trained hands ready. Pretty good, isn't it?'

'You can't lease the hands as well.'

'Ask 'em if they want to lose their jobs.'

Robert hoped that his face showed nothing. The chance of cheap looms had gone, or even of any looms at all without weeks of buying; and when they did start at Greenfield they would have Victoria mill against them to provide a competition they would find it hard to meet. It was certainly not welcome.

'I'll make a sight more money that way than by selling looms,' said Joe. 'And I shan't have to think about cotton.'

'Who do you think will lease your mill?'

'It might be Tom Thornber, if he's as sharp as he used to be. It might be any of 'em. Some of those putters-out might join at it, if they've any money left. I'll let you know when I've fixed it.'

He went cheerfully away, and Robert and Anna walked out to Greenfield that evening to take the news to John. He received it with his usual calm.

'It might be worse,' he said quietly. 'We'll take the lease ourselves.'

'What!'

'Isn't it obvious? If I can lease, I haven't lost much if the venture doesn't pay. If it does pay, we can put looms in here as well, and have a profit on both. A lease isn't a bad way of starting.'

Robert made haste to agree; and he was suddenly aware that he would be glad not to have to leave Victoria mill. He had somehow grown fond of the place. It was where he had first started, where he and Dick had sweated behind drawn curtains to learn how to use a loom, and he would be sorry to leave it to someone who would merely have hired it, and would have no sentiment for it.

'I'm glad,' he said simply. 'Am I to tell Joe that you're interested?'

'I don't know.' Again John paused, and then he slowly shook his head. 'It depends on whether other men will bid against me for the lease. Ask Nick about it. He knows the cotton men, and I'll accept what you and he decide.'

Nicholas was consulted as soon as Robert and Anna were

back at Cumberland House, and he listened appreciatively to the tale of what Joe meant to do.

'Smart chap, Joe,' was his comment. 'There's a sort of natural bounce in him, and he'll always come up with another one.'

'This seems to be a good one.'

'Fairly good. But I've told you before that he's not quite as good as he thinks he is. I don't think there'll be a rush for that lease.'

'The putters-out?'

'The only two that have any money are Lonsdale and Sutcliffe, and they hate the sight of Joe.'

'A man from another town?'
'It's only three hundred looms.'

'But a man in a small way, looking for a start?'

'That's just the sort of man Joe wouldn't trust with a lease. No security.'

'Then do I tell him that John's interested?'

'Say he did look interested, but he thought it would cost too much. That'll leave Joe to approach him.'

Robert told Joe exactly that, and then took some trouble to find out what the others thought. Sagar and Holroyd, he learned, had said outright that they had put enough money into looms. Sam Sutcliffe, with some memories of a night in the Hole i' th' Wall, said that Joe could go to hell. There remained Tom Thornber, who was heard to mutter that he had been put on once, and nobody was going to do it to him twice.

Then the news came that the great Petition had been rejected. Parliament had refused even to look at it, and the next move, if there was to be one, must come from the Chartist Convention. It was already in session, but everyone had known for weeks past that the delegates were divided about this. Some of them favoured force, a general uprising that must lead to civil war, and some were convinced that this was a road to ruin. But they could no longer avoid decision. So the nation waited through a tense week-end, and on Tuesday the news was out that the Convention had called for a National Holiday, by which it meant a general strike. All men, in all trades, were to lay down their tools, and there was to be no work in any trade until the Charter should be granted. Thus the Convention decreed; and it added that the Holiday was to begin in four weeks' time, on Monday, August 12th.

A chorus of voices rose at once, and those in Colne were as loud as any. The employers denounced it as rank sedition, but the voices of the labouring men rose even higher. Sam Cooper, who was still drawing pints at the Admiral Rodney, was said to have put the point as clearly as anyone. How, he asked, were the labouring men to organize this Holiday when there was no money, no food, and no anything? Did anyone suppose that men could start with nothing, and be ready in a month for such a thing as this? They did not even know how to begin. There was great coming and going in the Admiral Rodney, and after three days of it Sam was telling everyone that he and his friends had prevailed. The local Chartists had reported to the Convention that they had little hope of seeing the Holiday observed in Colne, since too many men in the town had wages they were loath to lose; and Harry Bolton, meeting Robert in the street, remarked that the power-looms at Victoria mill had had a lot to do with this.

What followed was ignominious. Reports of this sort had been reaching the Convention from everywhere, and it had become suddenly plain to the Delegates that they had grossly exaggerated their following. There was nothing for it but to retreat, and the Convention suddenly declared the Holiday cancelled. It asked for further reports about the People's wishes, and it dropped sly hints about leaving it to the People. Then it adjourned, as it said, for a month; but in fact the Convention was dead. It was discredited and gone, but the men who had forged the pikes were still where they had been. So were the pikes.

It was against this background of alarm that Joe had to negotiate his lease. He had already had a refusal from every likely man in the town except John Phillips, and the state of public affairs would hardly be an encouragement to anybody else. He and John were therefore watching each other warily, neither of them willing to make the first move, and it was Joe's patience that gave out first. He came into the counting-house towards the end of the week and flopped into a chair.

'You were saying Phillips might take a lease,' he said, 'Is he

still saying it?'

'I told you he wasn't. He said it would be too expensive.'

'Now don't be so soft. You know as well as I do that when he talks like that he's just starting to bargain. Tell him to come and see me.'

ENLIGHTENMENT

JOHN took the news calmly.

'We'll leave it till next week,' he said. 'It won't harm Joe to wait a bit longer, and there'll be no rush to lease anything just now.'

It proved a quiet week-end. There was no rioting, or any other show of strength by Chartists. But Sam Cooper, down at the Admiral Rodney, was heard to say that he expected Benbow in town again at any moment, and he was by now so accepted as an authority on Chartist matters that nobody doubted him. From that moment the arrival of Benbow was expected by everyone. Then, on Sunday night, an incident occurred which might not have had anything to do with Chartists, but was not reckoned to be any the better on that account. Sam Sutcliffe. going home from an evening in the King's Head, was set upon in Colne Lane, not ten yards from his own door, by a group of men whom he hardly saw. It was past ten o'clock, fully dark and drizzling with rain, and he did not even see their faces. He was not badly hurt, though he was bruised and bleeding when he picked himself up, but they had taken his watch, his keys, and all the money he had with him. They were clear away in the dark and he could say nothing whatever that would identify them.

The talk next morning was as much about Joe as about Sutcliffe. This was precisely what Joe had been predicting for some time past, and by midday he was the centre of a heated argument. He had seen what was coming, said one party, and it was a pity that notice had not been taken of his warnings; to which the others answered that his harping on this sort of robbery had no doubt prompted the rogues to do it. The one point on which both parties agreed was that it would certainly be done again. The Justices were of that opinion too, and Wood decided to call on his Special Constables. They were still grouped in the parties of twelve, and he now required that two parties should be on duty each evening. From eight o'clock, which was approximately the time of sunset, until half past ten, they were to patrol the main streets; and from half past

ten until midnight they were to remain at Bolton's office, ready for any call that might come.

It was in this disturbed week that John came at last to Victoria mill about the lease. This was on the Thursday and Joe's mood was hard to determine. He had been chuckling through the week about the attack on Sutcliffe, partly because it proved his predictions to be right, and partly because he disliked Sutcliffe. He had even made the gesture of having the clusters of gas burners outside Victoria mill lighted at nine o'clock each night, for the purpose, he said, of lighting Sam to bed. Robert thought it a heavy sarcasm, but Joe seemed pleased with it. He did not even grumble at the expense. But there were now only eleven days left of his partnership, and the tacklers and loomers and engine-tenter had all said bluntly that they would stay with Robert. It would therefore be all but impossible for Joe to run the looms himself, and in the present state of the town there seemed very little chance of any second offer to take a lease; which seemed to make it obvious that he would have to come to terms with John.

They met in the little office. Robert was present, but not directly concerned. Joe looked very hearty and confident, and he began by asking three hundred pounds a year for a five-year lease. John told him not to be a fool; the place was worth only half that, and he would want it for fourteen years with an option for another seven. Joe looked indignant and John impassive, and in another twenty minutes they had more or less come to terms at two hundred a year for ten years with an option for another five; and they had agreed that the lease should begin on the 12th of August, which was the day when Shaw & Hoyle would end. Then John sat back, tapping gently with his pencil on the sheet of notes before him.

'When would you move out?' he asked quietly.

'Out?' Joe's surprise was obvious. 'There's nothing to move out of. I've just my ironshop, and it's looms everywhere else. You'll have the whole run of 'em.'

'Oh no.' The pencil tapped more sharply. 'I'm offering for the whole building, not part of it.'

'What the heck! You don't think you're having my ironshop, do you?'

'Certainly I do.'

'You're bidding for a loomshop.'

'I'm bidding for a building. Did you think I should take it with somebody else in possession?'

'It's all you'll get.' Joe was staring angrily at him. 'What do

you want my bit for, anyway?'

'First, we want space to put more looms in, if we wish to. Second, we want sole possession of the keys, with no man using the building who isn't in our employ. Third——' He hesitated for a moment. 'Do you know how those ironshop rooms were used when the mill was built?'

'Of course I do. The man lived in 'em who had the place

before me.'

'Well, the man who comes after you may wish to live in them

too. I'm told he's to have a wife by and by.'

'Well, I'm damned.' Joe took a quick glance at Robert, and then swung back again with annoyance showing in his face. 'That ironshop's my living, and I'm not shifting out of it for anyone, whether he's to be wed or not.'

'I don't believe for a moment that the ironshop is your living. It might be a help, but that's all. In any case, you can

do it somewhere else.'

'Well, I'm not going to, and I don't care what you say. Who do you think you're talking to?'

'You'd better start changing your mind. Either that, or get someone else to take a lease. Let me know what you decide.'

John was reaching for his hat as he spoke, and in another minute he was gone, with Joe muttering angrily and Robert keeping a wary silence. He was expecting to be accused of having put John up to this, but nothing came, and in a few more minutes Joe went in search of his pint. Robert felt easier for that.

Even Anna looked surprised when he told her that evening, and she said she had no notion that John had it in his head that they might live at the mill. But she spoke thoughtfully and seemed to think it had some merits. They walked out to Greenfield together to ask about it, and John merely laughed.

'I doubt if we shall wreck it. But there's a little more to it than that. I don't like two firms, and two lots of workmen, in the same building. It could cause all sorts of trouble.'

'Well, as long as it doesn't keep us from a lease---'

'I don't think Joe has another customer. Anway, let's see what comes.'

But what came had nothing to do with cotton. At the end of

the week Robert was told that he would be required on Sunday night for duty with his party of Special Constables. He knew that two parties were being called each night, and it was understood that they were being chosen by the drawing of lots. This, therefore, seemed merely the luck of the draw, until Joe came into the office grumbling that he and his party had been called for Sunday night too. That made it look a little odd. Then a note was brought down from William Wood, heavily marked Confidential, in which he briefly asked to be lent the key of Victoria mill during Sunday evening for his own purposes. He gave no reason, but he added that both their parties might be needed later than midnight. He asked also that Joe's gas jets outside the door, which he was still burning each night to light Sam Sutcliffe home, should burn as usual on Sunday.

That left little doubt that Wood was expecting something, and that he had deliberately picked on the two parties that would best suit him, though why he wanted lights and a key to the door remained a mystery. Nor was there any hint of what he was expecting. Joe made a guess at Benbow, and went to see Bolton about it; who accepted the key and a promise of lights, but refused to say anything at all except that these preparations were to be kept a strict secret. Joe came back bursting with curiosity, and apparently in high good humour. He had made no further reference to the lease of the mill, though there was only a week left now to Shaw & Hoyle.

He was still in good humour when they reported for duty at eight o'clock on Sunday, though the first part of their work must have been as tedious to him as it was to the others. For two and a half hours they patrolled the streets, and there was nothing that even took their interest. There were no more drunks than was usual on a Sunday, and they were neither noisier nor worse behaved than usual. By ten o'clock the streets were quiet, and at half past ten there was hardly a light to be seen. Even the alehouses had shut, and only from the Red Lion, adjoining Bolton's office, did a shaft of light appear in welcome to the thirsty constables. They all trooped in, but Joe did not linger this time. He had one quick drink, and then he walked across with Robert to Bolton's office.

Both the magistrates were there, and Wood was crisp and precise. He told them at once that Benbow had come into the town during the afternoon, and was believed to be now in the Admiral Rodney, deep in some conference with the men who

had lately come forward as Chartist leaders. The intention, he said, was to arrest him under the warrant that had been issued at his last visit. It would not be wise to enter the Admiral Rodney for him, but he was believed to be staying for the night in a house at the foot of Windy Bank, and he was not likely to draw attention to himself by walking across with a large party. So there might be a chance of taking him in Colne Lane on his way up, and that was how Joe's gas jets would be useful. They would light his face as he came, and make it less likely that the constables would disclose themselves by trying to take the wrong man.

Joe chuckled suddenly, and Robert had to hold back an impulse to ask how Wood had learned so much about Benbow and his movements. Instead he merely nodded, and Wood turned now to the details. His instructions were precise and clear, and in another five minutes Robert had reclaimed his men from the Red Lion and was leading them by a devious route which brought them, at length, to the back of the Inghamite Chapel. He led them round to the side of it, and here he told them to wait. He went forward alone, and the flaring gas jets lit his face as he peered round the corner of the chapel. Below him, on the steep slope of the lane, there was darkness, but that mattered nothing. Any man who came into this pool of light would be clear to see, and Joe's gibe at Sutcliffe was proving very fortunate.

Footsteps sounded on the cobbles as Joe came down the lane alone. He unlocked the door of the mill and went inside, and a moment later the gas jets sank to twinkling points of fire, hardly to be seen. The face of the chapel melted away, the lane sank into gloom, and Robert had to look hard to see the four men who came quickly down the slope and entered the mill. These were the magistrates, with Bolton and old Asquith, the only paid constable the town had, and as soon as they had shut the door the lights flared up again. Joe came boldly out and went tramping up to join his hidden men. Then all was quiet. The lighted street was empty, and there was nothing to do but wait.

They settled to it with what patience they could, thankful for the mildness of the summer night. Robert went back for a word with his men, and then returned to the corner to watch. Below him, in Waterside, the few remaining lights died one by one from the windows. Footsteps rang on the cobbles again as

a man came down the lane, but he was a stranger. Then slower steps were heard as two men climbed the lane, but they, too, were strangers. It was nearing half-past eleven when a sound of feet came again from the darkness, feet that were faster now, and purposeful. Robert whispered quickly to his men, and then he crouched low as he watched the man from the dark take clearer shape. He was brisk and upright, walking forcefully, and suddenly Robert was sure that he could not be Benbow. He was not that build of man. He came quickly on, till he was fully under the lights, and again there was surprise. In the glare of the gas no one could mistake that face. This was Sam Cooper, of the Admiral Rodney.

A greater surprise followed. Cooper kept close to the wall of the mill, and Robert saw the door swing softly open. He watched for men to come out, but the opposite happened. Cooper turned sharply in. The door swung shut, and again the

street was empty.

Robert stood staring while he tried to work this out. Cooper had certainly not been pulled inside. He had walked in, which could only mean that he was reporting to the magistrates; and Robert felt his face hardening as he stared across at the lighted door. He had heard of these men who served both sides, and he wondered whether Cooper was seeking to make his peace, or merely taking double pay. He must have come as soon as he had finished work, and perhaps with news that Benbow was on his way. It could not be long now.

It was, in fact, another half-hour, and the waiting men were feeling the chill of midnight before they heard again the clump of feet on cobbles. No one doubted who it was, and Robert did not have to beckon to his party this time. They were all pressing behind him as three men came slowly from the dark. Robert stood very still, waiting till he could see who they were, and across the street he saw the door swing slowly open. The men came on, more and more into the night, and the one in the middle was Benbow.

But this night of surprises was not yet done, and neither Wood nor Foulds was the first to come from the door. It was a man in blue who stepped into the light, a man in a thick blue frock, with a heavy belt and a hard black hat. It was surely a policeman's coat, and for an instant Robert almost thought that here was Sergeant Harris back from London. Then his own men prodded him, and he ran forward to shut the road.

He was only just in time. Benbow made no attempt to escape, but the two men with him tried to run for it. Then, as Robert and his party hurled themselves across the road, they doubled about again tearing away into the darkness up the hill, where Joe and his men were waiting. But Robert had forgotten them in another shock of surprise. He was within a few feet now of the man in blue, able to see his face, and he was Sam Cooper, who had been posing as a tapster. He was stepping up to Benbow now.

'I am Sergeant Cooper of the Police Office in London. I have

Angry voices up the hill broke in, and the sounds of a scuffle, and ten minutes later it was all over. The gas jets were out, the mill locked and empty, the lane dark and deserted. Twenty-four constables were in the King's Head, and Joe and Robert were in Bolton's office, where Wood was speaking to the two men who had tried to run. No charge would be brought against them, he said, but they would do well to remember how much was known about them by Sergeant Cooper. His evidence could send the pair of them to transportation, and they had better be careful of what they said and did.

He dismissed two frightened men, and his tired face looked strained as he sank into a chair.

'If your offer of brandy still holds good, Bolton, I think—'Of course. I think we might all of us—'

'Thank you.' Wood turned quietly to Joe and Robert. 'I'm much obliged to you both. We have him safe at last, and it's largely thanks to your help.'

'We do our best,' said Joe. 'But what about Sam Cooper': Is he really a Peeler?'

'Oh yes. He and Harris came here together, and they really are Manchester men, or used to be. I'm sorry I couldn't take you fully into confidence about it. But no one at the Rodney was told about Harris, and you weren't told about Cooper. It all had to be as secret as it could be.'

'It's been a fair take-in,' said Joe. 'Of course I can see now why he looked out of that dandy shop when he had Benbow there.'

'He was trying to invite you in. I'm afraid it became a little muddled after that.'

'Aye. Fancy me sitting on a Peeler.' Joe was still chuckling happily. 'I hope those lights of mine were all right?'

'Tonight? They were excellent, thank you, and a great help.'

'Aye.' Joe seemed to hesitate for a moment. 'You know, folks have been laughing at those lights, since I put 'em on this week.'

'You may say they've been useful tonight. But really, gentlemen, it's been most satisfactory, and there won't be a Chartist in the town who isn't wondering how much Cooper can swear against him. I'm hoping for a lot less trouble after this.'

It began to seem that the hope was justified. By the next morning the whole town was buzzing with the tale of Sergeant Cooper, who had been so readily accepted by the Chartists, and no constable who had seen the arrest of Benbow needed to buy his own beer. He could have it free if he would only talk. Down in Waterside the talk ran even faster, but not so comfortably. Everyone was asking who would be arrested next. and men who had been prominent Chartists were looking at each other unhappily. Then a rumour started that the soldiers were coming from Burnley to search the houses, and that anyone found with pikes would be transported. It was quite untrue, but it ran like wildfire, and it gave Harry Hartley a tale to tell. There had been a rush, he declared, to be rid of the things, and men had been throwing pikeheads into the river. Others had been trudging out of town with spades, to bury pikes in any lonely field, and there was a tale of a bag full of pistols found by a farmer in a ditch. With one thing and another it looked as if the chance of serious rioting was now remote, and anyone could feel the change in the town. Dick Bradley came into the office that afternoon and said that Nicholas was thinking of a weaving shed at St. Helen's mill.

'I've just been down there,' he told them, 'and he's outside with young Tom and a tape measure. Seems pleased with himself. But he's talking about the colliery.'

'What's that to do with it?'

· 'He says he's short of money. He can't have his weaving shed unless the colliery does well.'

'Eh?' said Joe, and it was the first sign he had shown of interest in the talk. 'Short of money, is he? Well, all help one another. That's what I say. Good morning.' He was reaching suddenly for his hat. 'See you another time.'

He went breezily away, to Robert's annoyance. He had been wanting a word with Joe, and he much suspected that

Dick's arrival had merely provided him with a chance to escape. Robert was becoming worried. The partnership was to end this week, and there had been no further move about the lease. Joe seemed uninterested, John was waiting for news, and Robert was beginning to fear that someone else might make an offer, now that weaving sheds seemed a good investment. It was disturbing enough to persuade him that he had better see John as soon as possible. He went to Cumberland House as soon as he was free, and Anna seemed pleased at his suggestion of a walk to Greenfield.

'It'll be a change,' she said, 'and perhaps soothing. Ellen says she's put out.'

'What about?'

'Nick's tea. What has he been doing?'

'Measuring for a weaving shed, from what I'm told.'

'Yes, but——' She sounded dissatisfied as they stepped into the street together. 'Nick said at dinner time that he and Tom would be busy all afternoon, and he didn't think they'd be up for tea. He wanted it sent down.'

'Yes?'

'Well, that was all right. It happens every now and then, and Susie went down with the basket about five o'clock. Nick wasn't there, and that's what annoyed Ellen. She'd taken some trouble over his tea, and he hadn't waited for it. How does Joe come into this?'

'Joe?'

'I'm sorry. We're getting muddled. Nick wasn't there. Susie asked where he was, and Tom said they were measuring for this shed when Joe turned up. That must have been about four o'clock.'

'Oh?' Robert's tone had sharpened suddenly. This meant that Joe must have gone straight down to St. Helen's after leaving the office this afternoon. 'What did he want?'

'I don't know. Tom says that Joe and Nick were talking hard. Then Joe went away, looking rather pleased, and Nick went off too. He told Tom that if he was wanted he'd be at Vivary Bridge. So he missed his tea, and Ellen's put out.'

'But Vivary Bridge?'

'That's what set Ellen buzzing. She wanted to know what it was all about. But Nick didn't come home till nearly seven,

and then he said he was busy and he'd tell her some other time. He munched a mouthful standing up, and went straight out again.'

'Where to?'

'The Hole i' th' Wall, I fancy. But don't ask me why.'

'It must be this weaving shed. Joe hurried off as soon as Dick had told us about it, and he must have gone straight down to Nick.'

They had made no sense of it when they arrived at Greenfield and John agreed that it was suspicious. Joe's behaviour had been mysterious enough in recent days without this, and his attitude to the lease had hardly been that of a man who was making it his first concern. John admitted that he might have done better to go to closer quarters with so slippery a fellow as Joe.

'Anyway,' he said, 'I'll see Joe in the morning. Will you tell him so?'

'If I can. But he's been out so much of late that I never know whether I'll see him.'

'Couldn't you call at his house tonight and tell him?'

'Yes,' said Robert firmly. 'And if he isn't there, I can leave word with Jane.'

'Good. We'll either settle this tomorrow or we'll buy our looms elsewhere.'

'Do you think it's your wanting the ironshop that's upset him?'

'I don't know, but I don't want Joe in our mill. I'd sooner pay a little more, and have the place to ourselves. Anyway, let him know that I want him in the morning, and he'd better not be late.'

That left Robert without much time to spare if he were to take Anna home and then make his visit to Joe, and perhaps he hurried it too much. It was scarcely half past nine when they arrived at Cumberland House, and he was willing enough to go in with Anna for a few minutes. They were still climbing the stair when they heard from the parlour a voice that set them looking at each other in surprise. Anna flung the door open, and Joe was propping himself comfortably against the hearth while he toyed with a glass of port. Nicholas, with his usual brandy, was in a chair.

'Good evening,' said Anna.

'Same to you,' said Joe. 'Robert with you? That's right. Stick close.'

'Have a drink?' said Nicholas.

It was hard to say which of the two looked the more pleased. Nicholas poured wine, and Joe exuded goodwill.

'Been far?' he asked.

'Greenfield.'

'How's Stick-in-the-mud? Has he thought any more about that lease?'

'I think his offer's still open. He's coming to see you about it tomorrow.'

'So he should.' Joe drained the last of his port cheerfully. 'Tell him if he'll come another ten pound a year, he can have the lot, ironshop and all.'

'Here you are,' said Nicholas.

Robert took the wine, and glanced quickly at Anna, who was sitting very still and quiet. She did not look at him.

'Thanks,' he said. He made himself sound unhurried, and he made a show of tasting the wine before he turned again to Joe.

'You mean you'll leave the ironshop?'

'That's what I said.' Joe expanded his chest comfortably. 'I'll be too busy this winter to mess about with gates and locks. It's a warehouse I'll want, not a workshop.'

'Oh?'

'That's why he can have it. If he makes it worth my while, of course. Oh, thanks——'

He was happily holding out his empty glass for Nicholas to fill, and he looked more pleased than ever. Robert felt baffled. Anna tilted her head and gave Joe the full force of her smile.

'I like to hear of a man being busy, Mr. Hoyle.'

'Oh well—' He turned to her at once, fully responsive. 'I always do my best, and you can't do more.'

'I'm sure it's a very good best, Mr. Hoyle. But what will you----'

'What do you keep saying Mr. Hoyle for? Can't you say Joe like the rest?'

'I expect I could.'

'You're going to be my sister-in-law, you know. Haven't you thought of that?'

'I think of a lot of things. But what's going to keep you busy this winter?'

'Gas.'

There was a world of satisfaction in the word, and again he puffed his chest out happily. Anna stared at him, fascinated. Then her voice was silky.

'I wish you'd explain it to me, Joe.'

'Well—' Joe looked as if he would explain anything to Anna. 'You see, a lot of these chaps are getting frightened about the dark nights. They think they'll have their windows smashed, or they'll be tapped on the nose, like Sam Sutcliffe.' He chuckled heartily. 'A real blessing, that was. It couldn't have come better.'

'But Joe—' Robert found his voice at last. 'If those men are frightened, that's your own doing. You've been talking that way for a month past.'

'Well, I might have said a word, now and then, but we fetched Tom Thornber up tonight, and there's nobody like Tom for talking about gas. He loves it.'

'I dare say he does,' said Anna. 'But who fetched him?'

'It was your brother. Tom doesn't like me so much, these days.'

'But why fetch him?'

'Well, it was just right, you see, with all of 'em talking about Benbow and the Peeler.'

'What's Benbow to do with it?'

'They took him under the gas, didn't they? They wouldn't have known his face without the gas. It made all the difference.'

'Yes, but---'

'Well, don't you see it? Mind you, it was Tom who had to say it. That's what we fetched him for. Light the whole town by gas, he says. You can see anyone's face with gas. You'll have the Bluecoats in the town before a winter's done, and if a man does what he shouldn't he'll have a dozen Peelers running after him. They'll all see his face with gas, says Tom. He loves gas.'

There was a long moment of silence. Anna looked at Joe with the air of one who has found a new and wonderful flower in the garden.

'You're going to light the whole town?' she asked.

'The ratepayers will do that. It'll cost a lot of money.'

'Ratepayers' meeting,' said Nicholas briefly. 'That's what it has to be, and we'll call it when the nights get dark. But there won't be any doubt of it, by the way they're talking.'

'Aye,' said Joe, 'and we needn't tell 'em what it'll cost, just yet. It'll be lamps stuck on posts, and lamps on brackets. Lamps everywhere. We'll have a special one by Sam Sutcliffe's place to get him home when he's drunk. Here's to Sam!'

Joe drained his glass and then held it out hopefully. Nicholas took it, and Joe turned again to Anna, who had still the air of a collector with a splendid specimen.

'Are you going to sell the lamps?' she asked.

'Oh, burners, you know, and glasses. Perhaps a few brackets.'

'Will that keep you busy all winter?'

'It's just the beginning. We'll have the whole town talking gas again, and there'll be hundreds of 'em who didn't have it in the house last winter saying they'll have it this time. I'd not be surprised if I didn't know which way to turn. Thanks—'

He took the refilled glass from Nicholas, and again he stood

beaming.

'There's the Gas Company, too,' he went on. 'It'll sell twice as much gas this winter. Might be three times. And what about the colliery that sells the coals?' He chuckled happily. 'That's how your brother's going to get his weaving shed.'

'Nick!'

Anna jumped to her feet delightedly, looking inquiringly at Nicholas. His smile as he answered was something between Joe's and her own.

'I take my chances when they come,' he said.

'You'll get your shed?'

I should do. As Joe says, it's not just the colliery. It's the Gas Company, too, and the shares will stand high if I want to sell.

'I'm so glad. And Robert too!'

'Aye,' said Joe. 'Think of one another, that's what I say. Come up another ten pounds, mind. When do you want to move in?'

'It would be good sense to start on Monday.'

'Monday it is, then. Party on Monday night?'

'Party?'

'Well, why not?' Joe drained his port at a gulp, and turned

appealingly to Nicholas. 'You can't start a firm without a party?'

'Well, don't look at me like that. When they get wed I'm to

pay for a band. My wife's told me so.'

'You want pies, as well as a band. But what about this party?'

'What does Anna say?'

'Me?' She spoke happily, with her eyes smiling. 'I always did like a party.'

'That's right,' said Joe. 'Tell you what—let Phillips pay for it. He's starting in cotton, so why shouldn't he?'

'He doesn't know how,' said Nicholas. 'He's never given a party in his life.'

'No?' Anna's eyebrows quivered, and then came slowly down. 'I'll tell him how. I'm good at parties.'

44

A WORD TO SAY

THEY were all there.

They came in twos and threes as work was ending on the first day of Shaw & Phillips, and the partners were at the door in welcome. Joe's big iron-shop, swept and tidied now, and with its tools and equipment packed for removal, made an odd setting for the eats and drinks, but nobody minded that. Robert tried to apologize for it, but the guests retorted that a mill was a place for work, and cught to look like one. Nicholas, who had been firmly told by his sisters that he was to make an answering speech for the guests, took a slightly different view. He came to the point at once.

'That's all very well,' he said, 'but there's something else too. There's a lot to be said for a man living at his work. In the old days the master lived at the mill. It was under his eye, and everyone knew where he was. I'd be living at my own mill now if my wife would let me.'

'Don't be silly,' said Ellen. 'In the old days everyone knew what his place was and he kept in it, but it's steam engines now and all these boilers, and it's a very bad example to children.'

'That's just what I'm saying. But I still think it's good for a man to live at his work, specially when he's starting. It's happened before, in this mill, and perhaps it'll happen again, once we get Robert wed to this sister of mine. There's to be a band, by the way. My wife says so. Anyway, I'm sure you'll all join me in wishing the best to both of 'em, whether the band's any good or not, and I don't think it will be. Here's to 'em! Robert and Anna!'

The glasses rose and clinked. A buzz of applause filled the room, and Anna smiled happily. Robert felt awkward, and wondered if he had to reply to this. But Nicholas had not finished.

'There's something else I want to say,' he went on. 'We're all very glad to see this new firm starting, and it's not only because we know John Phillips and Robert Shaw. They're friends of ours, and we wish them well, but even if we didn't I'd still be glad of this new firm. It's good for the town. It's progress. That's the point.'

Again there was a buzz of applause and some dutiful handclapping, but now he waved it down as if he were in earnest.

'I'm not forgetting the firm that finished here last week. That firm did a good work while it lasted. They were the first to start here with the power-looms. They showed us how to do it, and that's how progress happens. Somebody has to show the way, and the rest of us follow. So let's remember who was first. It was Shaw & Hoyle.' Again he waved impatiently as the handelaps tried to stop him. 'Now it's Shaw & Phillips, and it won't be long before they're a bigger firm, with looms at Greenfield as well as here, and that's what we want. The more wages we can pay, the less trouble we'll have. So I'm glad of Shaw & Phillips, and I hope you all are too.'

This time he waited for the applause, and it came generously, from men who thought as he did. Then, once again, they fell quiet as they saw him waiting.

'There are some other things too that we can be pleased about. 'I'm very glad to hear this talk of lighting the town by gas, so I think we might say a word of thanks to Tom Thornber. I'm very glad to see him here tonight, and——' He paused for an instant, and then grasped the nettle firmly. '—to see Tom and his wife. We all know he's newly wed, and I think it's the first time he and his wife have been out anywhere together. I hope it won't be the last. Tom's done a lot for us all, specially about this gas, so here's to him and his Ruth. That's all I have to say.'

He lifted his glass to Tom and Ruth, and for a moment there was hesitation in the room. Then Anna gave a lead, lifting her own glass high for them all to see. Barnard Crook was the first to follow her, with the tolerant Sagar swiftly after him, and in another moment the toast was being drunk by everyone. It brought Tom pushing to the front, his face red and happy as he stood before them.

'Thanks very much,' he said, 'and if any of you mean it, you can come down any night and we'll be glad to see you. But Ruth's my wife, and we're going to stay together, whether anyone likes it or not.' For a moment he was glancing at his sisters across the room, and then his face cleared. 'But that doesn't matter. What I want to say is that I've been glad to help about gas. I was the first to start it in this town, and I'm proud of that. Gas is progress, as Nick's just told us, and if you want to know what a town is like, see what gas it uses. If there's gas at every corner it's a coming town, and if it hasn't any gas it's back in grand-dad's day. That's what I think and that's why I'm glad of this talk we're to have it in the streets next winter. Thanks very much.'

He seemed to have finished, and he was moving away when he stopped abruptly. He glanced for a moment at Joe, and his face darkened.

'I'll tell you something else,' he added. 'If any of you buy gas fittings this winter, just watch what you pay. There's some that could put on you.'

There was laughter mixed with the handclapping as he pushed his way back to Ruth. Joe standing between Jane and

Mary Ann, beamed on everyone and looked quite unperturbed. Anna turned quickly to Robert, and he was moving forward when Joe jumped suddenly on a packing case at the side of the room.

'I've a word to say myself,' he began.

The buzz stopped as everyone turned. Joe waited for their attention.

'I've had a bit to do with all this,' he went on. 'Now I don't quite know whether this party is about the new firm that's starting, or about our Robert getting wed, but either way I'm pleased. I've had a bit to do with both. I'm very pleased he's having Anna England, and I think he's a lucky man. That's right—clap a bit.' He waited through a burst of applause, beaming on them all. 'Anna's a friend of mine. We get on fine, and that comes of having brains. We appreciate each other.' He had to stop again, for applause that was growing noisy. 'Of course, I know Robert very well. I wed his sister, and don't I know it! But what I want to say is that Nick's right about progress. I believe in progress, and I've always done my best for it. Live and let live is what I say, and when you know the town needs a new firm it's only right to do what you can to start one. That's why I've had a bit of money in cotton lately.'

'It's the beer,' said Holroyd. 'Softens the brain.'

'Then it won't hurt you much. But we all have to help our friends, and Robert's a friend of mine, so I did what I could. Got him started in cotton, you see.'

'Pretty good of you,' said Sagar.

'We all have to help each other. That's what I say, and it's best now to leave him to it, and me go back to ironwork. I could see it was better for him to be with Phillips. There'll be more money in the firm, and more space for looms, and more everything, so that's why I'm having a new warehouse and moving out of here. I don't want to be in their way.'

'He's wonderful,' said Anna, suddenly, and Joe seemed to hear her.

'It's nice to hear you say it,' he said. 'I just do my best, and you can't do more. But what I want to say is, we ought to drink to this new firm. It means a lot to both of 'em, and Anna too, and they're all friends of ours. Now then, are you ready? Shaw & Phillips!'

His glass was up, and the others rose with it. Anna clung to Robert's arm, and he felt her shaking.

'What a man!' she whispered. 'He's wonderful.'

'So are you.'

He whispered it back, and he felt her hand tighten on his arm as the applause broke out again.

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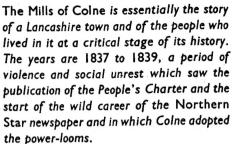
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